

Education

In the process of unification and the subsequent phases of the nation's growth and development, education has played a fundamental role, acting both as an instrument for modernisation and a factor of integration and social development of the most disadvantaged sections of the population.

Participation in education from the unification of Italy to the present day, viewed through the historical data presented in this section, provides a picture of the profound transformation that has taken place in our society over the last 150 years, due in large part to ever wider access to guaranteed education for citizens of both sexes.

The data presented are mainly drawn from surveys carried out in schools and universities over time, whereas the information on qualifications gained by the population is taken from general population censuses. In both cases, the sources date back a very long way. In 1861, the General Statistics Department set up at the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce was entrusted with the task of carrying out the first population census of the unified nation. The survey gathered the first information on the number of citizens able to read and write and on the then far larger number who were illiterate. Data on the school system, on the other hand, were collected by the Ministry of Public Education which published them in its *Education Yearbooks*. ISTAT only became responsible for education surveys in 1926, with the foundation of the Central Statistical Institute, involving a survey on schools of all levels to collect information on students, staff, etc., conducted every five years in collaboration with the Ministry itself. Today, after many years, responsibility for surveys of both schools and universities has been transferred to the Ministry once again.

The information contained in the surveys has progressively expanded over the years to include students results (failures, qualifications achieved) and providing geographical detail (regions, provinces and municipalities). More recently, survey forms have also included necessary details on students that are non-Italian citizens and disabled students.

Growing recognition of education's importance for a country's economic and social development led, in 2008, to the approval by the European Parliament and Council of Regulation no. 452 concerning the production and development of statistics on education and life long learning. The Regulation sets out the EU framework for the systematic production of statistics regarding the area of education and lifelong learning, with which all European Union member states must comply.

Education in census of population

Partly as a result of the low level of education among the population, the first census dedicated little space to education; from 1861 to 1931 the only information that was collected regarding the level of education referred to the ability to read and/or write. The "small census" carried in 1936 did not even record this information, and it was only in 1951 that citizens were asked to state their highest qualification in a free-text field.¹

Starting in 1971, however, the question was structured using a range of precoded choices (literacy, primary and lower secondary education), while the answer on upper secondary or university education was left open. A question concerning attendance of other courses of study was introduced. The survey method did not change in the next census, although the question on attendance of a regular course of study was extended to include nursery schools. A question on vocational courses lasting at least three months leading to a qualification, was also added.

In 1991, the attendance of nursery school by children under the age of three years was also asked.

In the 2001, the section of the questionnaire dedicated to "education and training" was revised to

¹ For information on population census, please refer to the section: [Population](#)

adapt it to the changes in the education system and the ever higher numbers of foreign citizens resident in Italy. The question on education level (which also included options for now obsolete qualifications) was precoded and a question was included for those with a qualification higher than lower secondary (with the exception of general upper secondary diplomas). Furthermore, questions on foreign qualifications and the years of study necessary to obtain them were also added, with the aim of ascertaining the number of Italians who completed their education abroad and of identifying *ex post*, through the ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education), the education level of foreign citizens who could not find their level of education among those indicated in the precoded answers, based on the Italian system.

The 2011 census will adopt a strategy similar to that applied in 2001, however with a larger number of choices for postgraduate qualifications and regional vocational programmes, in order to comply with 2009 EU regulations regarding the publication of census data.

The data taken from the censuses presented in this section refer to the composition of the population by education level. An additional information relating to the level of literacy is taken from ISTAT surveys on marriages, from which a time series of couples who were unable to sign the marriage certificate has been reconstructed².

Warnings for time series comparisons

- The census conducted from 1861 to 1881 and from 1951 to 2001 classified both those who could not read and write and those who could only read or only write as illiterate. The 1991 survey was an exception: only those who could not read or write were considered as illiterate. From 1901 to 1931 only those who could not read were classed as illiterate.
- The 1936 census did not record the education level.
- In 1951 the highest qualification obtained was required in a free-text field. The certificate of attendance (*proscioglimento* – issued after the third year of primary education) was included in primary school qualification.
- From 1961 onwards, the certificate of attendance was no longer considered as a qualification, and those holding it were mainly reclassified as “literate without any educational qualification”.
- From 1971 onwards, the question on the highest qualification was precoded (literacy, primary and lower secondary), whereas the description of upper secondary school or university qualifications was collected in a free-text field.
- In 2001, the question on education level was precoded and a question with a free-text field was asked to collect information on qualification higher than lower secondary school (with the exception of general upper secondary education).

Schooling

In 1861, with Italian political unification, the Casati Law (1859) was extended to all areas of the kingdom. This law established that primary school education was structured into two two-year sections, the first of which was obligatory and free of charge. This marked the beginning of the process that led to the progressive extension of compulsory education and the elimination of illiteracy. The first statistics on the school system, from nursery level to secondary schools, were collected by the Ministry of Public Education. Later, up until 1925, responsibility was transferred to the General Statistics Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce. The variables collected at the time were regarding schools, teaching staff and the total number of students enrolled. The gender breakdown was only available for pupils enrolled in primary school, while with regard to other school levels, distribution by gender was introduced in 1882 for pre-primary schools and in 1913 for secondary schools.

From 1926, the new Central Statistical Institute (ISTAT) took over the responsibility for conducting surveys on schools, which were performed every five years up until 1942. The survey forms, drawn up

² For information on marriage surveys, please refer to the section: [Households](#).

in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Education, were sent by the Ministry to the outlying school bodies responsible for collecting the information. Data on the individual schools in each district were totalised and submitted by school Inspectors to the respective Education authorities, who summarised and sent them to ISTAT, which took care of the final formatting and publication.

From 1942 to 1944 surveys on schools were suspended due to the war. When activities began again in the school year of 1945/46, the surveys started out on annual basis. The school became the survey unit and the task of summarising and processing results was taken over by ISTAT.

The surveys were of total kind and data were collected both on public and private schools. Local education authorities were directly involved in conducting the studies, and were responsible for delivering and collecting the questionnaires at individual schools, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Education. Data were collected every year in two separate surveys: the first, on 5th October, consisted in collecting the main provisional data (termed as “provisional data survey”); the second, conducted on 15th December (termed as “final data survey”), considered several aspects of school life, such as number of pupils and repeaters by gender and year, classrooms, classes, two shifts, evening schools, and teachers by gender and subject. Local education authorities also communicated the results of exams at the end of each yearly school cycle, already totalised and grouped by province.

ISTAT’s survey activities generally maintained this setup up until the early 1990s,³ when a process of restructuring of surveys began, eliminating those regarding provisional and final data, resulting in a single annual survey containing a suitably integrated version of all the information collected in the previous surveys. At the time, an information archive of public and private schools was created to manage the surveys, allowing the annual monitoring of the individual schools, regarding both the quantity (any closures, openings or merging of schools) and quality (consistency over time of the main informations relating to teachers and pupils).

The surveys were reviewed prior to the transfer of production of school statistics to the Ministry of Public Education (currently the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research, MIUR). Following Legislative Decree no. 322/1989 which established the National Statistics System (SISTAN) and encouraged the use of administrative data for statistical purposes, responsibility began to be gradually passed from one institution to the other. The process, which began in 1996 with the survey of pre-primary and primary schools relating to the 1993/94 school year, was concluded in 2001 when the Ministry took over the surveys on secondary schools. From that moment on, all statistical data were collected as part of the surveys carried out directly by the Ministry’s Statistics Office.

The surveys are conducted on an annual basis and the reference population is formed by all the schools of all levels. The survey unit is the school. For secondary schools, each evening class is considered as single survey unit within the same institution. The variables recorded provide an in-depth description of the school system and are mostly common to all types of school. The main variables regard classes or sections (number and type), pupils (gender, age, attended year of study course, citizenship, disabilities), those repeating the year, examinations, and permanent and non-permanent teaching and non-teaching staff at public schools, etc.

From the 2006/2007 academic year, the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research has rationalised the collection of information on schools, integrating their own management archives with statistical surveys. The Education Information System (SIDI) now allows schools to benefit from a single access point for communicating data to the Ministry, whether in the forms submitted for various statistical surveys or relating to MIUR administrative activities (pupils and classes to calculate the number of teachers and personnel required for state schools). The only exception is the special-statute province of Bolzano, which collects data independently and submits them to the provincial Statistics Office.

University education

At the time of Italian unification, higher education was a privilege of the few and universities system was structured in only 5 faculties and 7 universities, although only ten years later the system counted 17 state universities and 7 “free” universities.

The first available information on the Italian university system is included in the survey on the

³ Over time the survey of summary data was extended to include the results of examinations and tests which were therefore no longer transmitted by local Education authorities.

conditions of public education in the Kingdom of Italy carried out by the Supreme Council for Public Education. This report, although not conducted for statistical purposes, included information on university students enrolled in the 1863-64 academic year, broken down by university, and the overall number of graduates in the previous decade. On the contrary it did not include information concerning neither the number of attended years nor the gender of students, as women were allowed in university education only in 1874.

From the 1880-81 academic year up until 1894-95, data regarding higher education were collected and published by the General Statistics Department in the volumes of the *Statistics on Education* series. Every year the statistics on students and graduates, broken down by faculty, were published for the various universities, together with some data relating to professors. After 1895, the Statistics Department ceased to be responsible for statistics on education. The small amount of information on universities continued to be published in the pages of the *Bulletin* of the Ministry of Public Education. Only in 1911 the first detailed information regarding foreign students and graduates was published for the years between 1905 and 1910. From 1911 onwards, the *Statistical Yearbook* began once more to be published yearly.

In the series of the *Statistical Yearbook*, the *Statistics of universities and higher education institutions* were published, including for the first time information on the distribution of students and graduates by gender. The study also contained summary tables on students enrolled in each faculty and university from 1893 to 1911, the time series on graduates from 1905 to 1910 and statistics on foreign students enrolled in Italian universities between 1906 and 1911.

Data on universities were collected on an increasingly regular basis thanks to the foundation of ISTAT. Two annual surveys on higher education were set up, similar to those on schools: a first one, for the main data, with reference to 15th December (December, 15th), and a second one, referring to different dates according to the concerned issue (personnel, students enrolled by year of course and gender, graduates, new entrants), teaching staff, foreign students, specialisation courses, etc.). These surveys, which covered all types of university course (diplomas, degrees and post-graduate qualifications), were carried out without using intermediate survey institutions, i.e. by contacting the administration departments of each single university directly.

The foundation of the Central Statistical Institute of the Kingdom of Italy coincides with the attention being paid again to the theme of higher education statistics. With the survey related to the 1926-27 academic year, published in the *Statistical Yearbook* and then replicated with reference to the 1931-32 academic year, traditional statistics on students, graduates and teaching staff were expanded to include a large amount of additional information regarding the structure of university education, the courses' topics and non-teaching staff, including also financial data. Moreover, for the first time the survey included students still studying over the official number of course years in each university and degree course, although data on the course year being attended were still lacking. In the same year the survey on the social condition of students was carried out for the first time. Using individual questionnaires, several types of information were collected regarding the personal characteristics of students, their region of birth and that of their family's residence as well as their father's occupation. The survey was not repeated afterwards and no other specific statistical surveys regarding university education were carried out. On the contrary the collection of summary data, published annually in the *Italian Statistical Yearbooks*, was continued until 1942-43, when it was interrupted due to the deteriorating war situation.

After the Second World War, ISTAT restarted survey activities in a systematic manner and on a regular basis. Since 1945 onwards, data regarding students were collected separately by university, faculty and course as well as by the attended year of course. Since 1950 more detailed information was also collected on students still studying over the official number of course years, allowing analyses on the regularity of study careers paths. In that period, data regarding higher education started to be published in specific volumes dedicated to the different levels in the education system: firstly the *Yearbook of Education Statistics* and later the *Education Statistics*.

During the 1990s ISTAT reviewed and extended the information covered by the survey. The process was prompted by the stipulation of an agreement with the Ministry of Education aimed to the creation of an "assessment-oriented information system", designed to monitor the university system, which led to a greater use of the (operational) archives already available at the Ministry, the renovation of some surveys, the launch of others and the removal of some considered to be obsolete. Since the 1996-97 academic year onwards, surveys on higher education were gradually transferred from ISTAT to the

MIUR and, from the 1998-99 academic year, ISTAT ceased to produce this information. Since then, all surveys on data regarding higher education are handled by the Ministry, which is also responsible for their publication.

The surveys are carried out on an annual basis, collecting data from each university and institution for the “right to education”. Data refer to each single course or to the university as a whole according to the survey form used. The Ministry’s statistics office also provides data on professors sourced from the administrative archives.

ISTAT completes the information framework on education through sample surveys on graduates interviewed approximately three years after having attained secondary school or university qualifications. The surveys, which are carried out once every three years, are part of an integrated system that aims to develop information on the study or work paths that students go on to after ending their course. The system has recently been completed by extending the surveys to doctorate holders. This is a total survey which covers all doctorate holders three and five years after their qualifications.

The first survey on university graduates’ placement was carried out in 1989 with reference to those who graduated in 1986. The first survey on upper secondary school graduates was carried out in 1998 referring to those who graduated in 1995.

Warnings for time series comparisons

- Until 1941 data on lower secondary education (formerly *scuola media inferiore* or lower secondary school) are included in those related to upper secondary education (formerly *scuola secondaria superiore* or upper secondary school).
- Until the 1944-45 academic year, the number of students still studying over the official number of course years was not included in the total number of enrolled students.
- From 1945 to 1962, lower secondary schools also included vocational schools.
- From the 1945-46 to the 1960-61 academic year, data on single schools were collected. In following years, until 2008-09, data referred to school units.
- For the 1951-52 academic year, the attendance certificate (obtained after three years of primary education) was included in the primary school leaving certificate.
- From the 1998-99 to the 2008-09 school year, data on teaching staff at lower and upper secondary schools refer only to state schools.
- From the 2006-07 school year onwards, data relating to students in upper secondary schools also include those enrolled in the first and second year of vocational schools in the special-statute province of Bolzano, recognized for compulsory education completion (Finance Law 2007, comma 623).

Main regulatory measures

- The Casati Law (1859) establishes that primary school should be structured into two cycles of two years, of which the first cycle was compulsory. Municipalities were responsible for primary education, including school buildings and teachers’ salaries. All classes were divided according to gender. After primary school there were two options: technical education (technical school or technical institute, each lasting three years) and classical education (*ginnasio* lasting two years and *liceo* lasting three years). In 1861, the law’s application was extended to several new territories acquired during the process of Italian unification, marking the birth of the national education system, in particular for primary schools. The law’s formal and practical implementation in the different parts of the new Kingdom of Italy took place in a largely non

homogeneous manner. Nonetheless, in the following decade the attendance rate for primary school rose from 38 to 61 pupils enrolled per 1,000 inhabitants, while the number of students enrolled in secondary school became twice, although it was still very few in terms of absolute numbers. The Casati Law completely reformed also the university system, by introducing new university faculties: in addition to the three original medieval faculties (Theology, abolished in 1873, Law and Health) two new faculties were introduced: Humanities and philosophy and Physical, Mathematical and Natural Sciences, to which the three-year course for training engineers was annexed. In terms of enrolments the reform had a limited effect, as university studies remained a limited phenomenon for a small élite up until the end of the First World War.

- In 1874, for the first time, women were granted access to *licei* and universities.
- In 1877 the Coppino Law was issued, establishing the compulsory schooling up until the age of nine, attempting to implement the principle of compulsory primary schooling, and setting fines for parents who failed to comply it.
- In 1904 the Orlando Law extends compulsory schooling to the age of 12, creating a “popular course” formed from fifth and sixth classes, and establishing the not weekdays school and the evening schools for the illiterate. As a result of the Coppino and Orlando Laws, from the beginning of the 20th century participation in education rose steadily, and in the 1919-20 school year, immediately after the end of the First World War, enrolments in primary schools exceeded 4-million for the first time, whilst enrolments in secondary schools reached nearly 400,000 units.
- In 1911 the Credaro Law emphasises the principle of primary education as a public service and gives greater weight to the systematic expansion of primary education.
- In 1923 the Gentile Reform was launched. Nursery schools, known as *scuole materne*, became the first (preparatory) level of primary education. Compulsory schooling was raised to the age of 14, and after five years of integrated primary school, pupils’ study careers split between vocational training complementary school lasting three years, which did not permit the continuation of studies and three types of lower secondary schools: *ginnasio*, which permits access to the classical and scientific liceo; *lower technical institute* which leads either to a technical upper institute or to a scientific liceo; or the *teachers training institute*, with an overall duration of seven years, leading to the primary school teacher qualification. Higher education was also “structurally reformed”, by introducing the distinction between universities and other higher education institutions. Access to all university faculties is allowed only to those with a classical *liceo diploma*. Scientific liceo graduates could access only to technical/scientific faculties (thus excluding the faculties of Law and Humanities and Philosophy), while the other graduates were not allowed to enrol in university studies. The Gentile Decree also establishes the existence of free universities, binding their legal recognition and the legal value of the qualifications issued by them to the acceptance of the regulations set out by the reform. Among them, there were Perugia, Urbino, Camerino and Ferrara. Following the raising of the compulsory school-leaving age to 14 and the regime’s commitment to raising the level of education across broad sections of society, during the years of fascism the participation in education received a powerful boost at all education levels. Primary school attendance rose by almost 23%, while secondary schools and universities recorded a rise of 156% and 213% respectively.
- In 1933 Law no.1592 on higher education and subsequent legislative provisions (Royal Legislative Decree no. 1071 dated 20th June 1935 and no. 439 dated 25th February 1937) was almost completely eliminated the autonomy of universities, placing serious restrictions upon the freedom of teaching and of studying.
- In 1948 the Constitution of the Italian Republic recognised again the freedom of education and teaching (art. 33, comma 1 and 6), and at least eight years of compulsory schooling.
- In 1962 Law no.1859 establishes the Unified middle school, replacing all other types of lower secondary education. School became free and compulsory for all pupils aged 11 to 14. The effects of the reform were reflected in a rise in education attendance rates.
- In 1964 the free supply of school books in primary school was introduced.
- In 1968 (Law no. 444 dated 18th March) the “state nursery school” was created, with a duration of three years.
- In 1969 the Codignola Law reformed the access requirements to university, allowing entry to

all upper secondary graduates. Furthermore, the law authorises the liberalisation of courses, allowing students to draw up their own plans independently from those set out by the syllabuses then in force, as long as they fell within the area of the actually taught subjects and within the predetermined number of courses. As a consequence the rate of participation in university education rose constantly from the 1970s on.

- In 1999 the Berlinguer Reform was introduced (Decree no. 509). According to the Bologna Process, known as the “3+2 model”, the academic paths change as follows. Two separate cycles are introduced: the first one lasting three years (1st level) and the next one lasting two years, (2nd level), each ending with the attainment of a university degree (*laurea*). The reform made the credit mechanism obligatory for all study courses with the exception for doctorate courses.
- In 1999 Law no. 508 established the new Higher Art and Music Training (AFAM) system consisting of Academies of Fine Arts, Musical Conservatories and Musical Institutes, the National Academy of Drama, the National Dance Academy and the Higher Institute for Applied Arts. AFAM courses are structured in a similar way to university courses and the academic qualifications attained in the system are equipollent to university degrees (Law no. 268/2002).
- In 2000 the Berlinguer Reform (Law no. 30) extends compulsory schooling to the age of 15, including the first year of secondary school. Students that chose to leave the school after this initial year are nonetheless obliged to attend some form of training up to the age of 18 or up to attain at least one vocational qualification. The positive attendance of any segment of upper secondary school, on either an annual or module basis, allows the acquisition of a education credit that can also be used at a subsequent date in order to return to previously interrupted studies, to change from one study course to another one or to transfer to vocational training. Similarly, attendance of professional training courses allows the acquisition of credits that can be used to access the education system.
- In 2003 the Moratti Reform (Law no. 53) provides a common course for all students up to the third year of lower secondary school. At the end of the first cycle, students have the option of continuing their studies in upper secondary school (the *liceo* system) or entering in vocational training programmes or continuing their training in the form of an apprenticeship. All students had the right/obligation to continue some form of education or training for at least twelve years or, in any case, until they attained a qualification by the age of 18. In that period the attendance of upper secondary education by young people recorded a constant rise.
- In 2004 the Moratti Reform of University (Decree no. 270) left the “3+2 model” unchanged and introduced a limit of 180 credits for first level degrees and 120 for “magistrale” degree, previously defined as “specialist” degree. The courses offered and qualifications awarded by universities were set out, providing the outline of the current system: 1st-level degree courses (three years), 2nd-level specialised degree courses (two years) following 1st-level courses and specialist/magistrale single-cycle degrees (five-six years). Only the specialist/magistrale degrees allow access to postgraduate research courses (doctorate). The first years of the Reform have resulted in a rise in the number of students enrolled and graduates.
- Since the 2004-05 academic year, as a result of the decree implementing the reform of the school system (Legislative Decree no. 59/2004), the primary school leaving examination at the end of the fifth year of primary schooling was abolished.
- In 2006 Finance Law no. 296 (art. 1, comma 622) it was introduced the obligation to attend schooling for at least ten years, with the aim of making it possible to obtain a secondary school qualification or vocational training of at least three years by the age of eighteen.
- From the 2007-08 academic year, school attendance is compulsory up until 16 years (Decree no. 139 of 22nd August 2007).
- Law no. 183/2010 (art. 48, comma 8) established that the right/obligation to receive education and training (established in article 48 of Legislative Decree no. 276/2003) is also fulfilled by an apprenticeship course.