In general, national policies recently developed in the education field can be considered as part of the wider frame of lifelong learning (LLL). However, the implementation of EU lifelong learning strategies, which have the person in his/her learning activity as a reference, is transversal to the educational, labour and continuing professional development sectors.

Policy making involves different institutions, from the State to the Regions to the Local authorities. One of the most important steps towards decentralisation has been the reform of Title V of the Italian Constitution (law no. 3/2001) which has transferred to the Regions many of the competences of the State in the field of vocational training and adult education.

Afterwards, law no. 53/2003, which reformed the whole education system, introduced several important changes that can be considered as general LLL strategies. For example, law 53 established the right/duty (diritto/dovere) of all to education and training, either in the State education system or in the regional vocational training system, for 12 years or at least up to the acquisition of a three-year qualification within 18 years of age.

in 2007, the length of compulsory education has been extended to 10 years, including the first two years of upper secondary education. Dispositions on compulsory education also have established both key competences of citizenship, in analogy with the EU key competences, and competences and skills that students must have acquired at the end of compulsory education.

Moreover, starting from school year 2010/2011 the reform of the second cycle of education has involved both the general and the technical and vocational pathways. According to the reform, all types of upper secondary school last 5 years and can lead directly to university studies.

More recently, law no. 92/2012, which reformed the labour market, has provided a formal definition of lifelong learning: 'lifelong learning encompasses learning activity, whether formal, non-formal or informal, undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective'.

According to the law, formal learning takes place in the education and training system as well as universities and High-level arts, dance and music education institutes. It leads to a qualification or a vocational three-year qualification or diploma, also through an apprenticeship, or a recognised certification.

Non-formal learning corresponds to an intentional choice of the learner carried out outside the formal system, in organisations with educational and training aims, in voluntary settings, national civil service or private social services as well as in enterprises.

Informal learning not necessarily corresponds to an intentional choice of the learner, but to activities and interactions in everyday life situations, at work, at home and in the leisure time.
Following law 92/2012, the Legislative Decree no. 13/2013, has laid down the general dispositions on the national system of certification of competences. The aim of these dispositions is to make arise and develop professional competences non-formally and informally acquired, and to promote professional and geographical mobility, to facilitate the contact between labour supply and demand, to increase the transparency of learning and the recognition of certifications at national and European level.

Regional vocational education and training courses, both at secondary (IFP) and at post-secondary level, lead to qualifications and competences spendable in the labour market. In this view, they can be considered, as the other education and training pathways available in the Italian education system, as means to realize the LLL strategies. Moreover, the recent recognition of regional IFP courses as means to fulfil compulsory education goes in the same direction.

As for higher education, measures have been taken to encourage the participation of non-representative groups of students and for the recognition of prior learning. First of all, the possibility to apply for part-time courses has been introduced; it implies a reduction in the annual study load – equal to 60 university credits – and an extension of the duration of the course of study. Moreover, the accreditation of online universities facilitates the access to university studies for disadvantaged groups of students, such as working students, disable students, adults, etc. In the same way, traditional universities can to offer partially or totally online programmes of study.

Adults aged more than 25 and without an upper secondary education certification, are admitted to the upper secondary education final exam without attending school courses.

Finally, universities can also start continuing professional development courses, focusing on scientific in-depth studies in specific areas. Courses usually last a few months corresponding to a workload of less than one year (less than 60 credits). At the end of courses, universities issue an attendance certificate or a diploma which denomination can vary. Higher education institutes can establish their own criteria for the recognition of prior learning within the limits (a maximum of 12 credits) specified for each course of study.

As for the adult education sector, in February 2013, the Presidential Decree no. 263/2012 containing ‘General dispositions for the re-definition of the didactic and organisational asset of the Adult education centres’ has come into force. According to the new regulation, former Permanent territorial centres (CTPs) and ‘evening courses’ merged into the Provincial Adult education Centres (Centri provinciali per l’istruzione degli adulti – CPIA). The Centres provide an educative offer organised in levels of learning aimed at the obtainment of the qualifications released within the mainstream education system, as well as at the acquisition of basic competences for foreigners.

CPIAs operate nationwide.