

StayOn_

A more inclusive, active
and creative world!

POTENTIALS ASSESSMENT REPORT

ITALY

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1. INTRODUCTION

StayOn is a transnational project coordinated through the cooperation of eight European partners whose ultimate objective is to create conditions that enable young people to "stay on" rural areas by ensuring access to opportunities, benefits, services, and jobs. With this potentials assessment report, we intend to examine current and future labor market needs and identify potentials for implementing possible support solutions in Italy by Association ATIS, one of StayOn's project partners. This report is to be read as part of the project's "Impact management and research" work package, representing a systematic effort to provide credible evidence on the causal impact of interventions meant to integrate young adults, and NEETs¹ especially, in the labor market.

The work package is managed by the European Center for Social Finance (ECSF). It encompasses a series of activities, including developing a Theory of Change and related impact management framework, creating periodic impact evaluations, and learning to inform decision-making within and among the organizations involved. This report proceeds as follows. After this brief introduction, Section 2 details the methodology used to conduct the potentials assessment, Section 3 describes the context, while Section 4 reports the findings. Finally, in the last section, we interpret them and discuss the lessons learned to facilitate the translation of findings into practice for the project's partners.

2. METHODS

Data collection

Data collection took place in two phases. The first step included a questionnaire filled out jointly by two informants: a local representative employed by the project partner Association ATIS and an external stakeholder. The questionnaire, available in full in the Appendix to this report, was divided into four parts and gave the respondents the chance to support their answers with secondary sources:

- 1) The first part aimed at gathering general information about the respondents and their organizations;
- 2) The second part explored the Italian community or communities of interest in the implementation of the project;
- 3) The third part investigated ten driving forces of youth employment within the local context (these are listed in Table 1 below);
- 4) In the fourth part, the respondents were involved in ranking the driving forces according to the level of impact on youth employment and the degree of influenceability. The goal at this stage of the research process was to classify the driving forces into four categories:
 - *negligible blows* show low impact and low influenceability on youth employment;
 - *realizable trifles* are highly influenceable driving forces with low impact on youth employment;
 - *unshapable trends* are characterized by high impact and low influenceability;

¹ Young persons not engaged in education, employment or training.

- *crucial potentials* are highly impactful and highly influenceable driving forces that represent prospects for action;

5) The last part allowed for final comments and the possibility to share further insights about the phenomenon.

Table 1. Driving forces of youth employment (Parola, 2020)

<i>Driving forces external to the labor market</i>	<i>Driving forces internal to the labor market</i>	
	<i>Demand for workers</i>	<i>Supply of workers</i>
A. Automation	C. State of the economy	F. Poor skills of job-seekers
B. Globalization	D. Type of contracts	G. Type of education
	E. Informal work	H. Skills mismatch
		I. Demographic factors
		J. Socioeconomic factors

As indicated by researchers at the ECSF, external stakeholders could be - but were not limited to - public officials and other public servants (e.g., mayors, council members, politicians), young people not in employment nor education and their families, youth workers, and business owners in the community or communities of interest. For this study, the external stakeholder chosen holds a Master's Degree in Work and Organizational Psychology and is a project manager at Forma.lab. This Italian organization specializes in private and publicly funded training to complement the professional offerings of SMEs and public administrations.

Phase two of data collection consisted of an online interview with the local representative and the external stakeholder. The goal of the interview was to have a clearer understanding of the questionnaire responses collected in phase one. The interviewees were asked a series of open-ended questions, resulting in follow-up questions by the interviewer. The interview was held in Italian via Zoom on 16 March 2022, lasted 54 minutes and revolved around the information provided in the questionnaire.

Data analysis

We employed an amended version of the intuitive logics approach to scenario development to analyze the data, which is particularly suited to support decision-making processes by generating options for action (Kosow & Gaßner, 2008). Depending on their position in the two rankings, driving forces were assigned a weight (from one to ten). Driving forces ranked number one were assigned a weight of ten, driving forces ranked number two were assigned a weight of nine, and so forth. This process allowed for the development of an impact/influenceability matrix. We then examined the respondents' input regarding the four quadrants in which the ten driving forces appeared.

3. THE ITALIAN CONTEXT

Association ATIS

Association ATIS is an employment agency founded in 2003 to promote career interventions aimed at at-risk young people. Within the StayOn project, Association ATIS takes on the role of community catalyst partner, acting as a change agent that unlocks

youth potential and manages change activities in several rural communities. The organization is located in Palermo, a city on the northwest of the island of Sicily, Italy. Sicily is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea and the biggest region of Italy, with over 5 million inhabitants. This region was founded in 1946 and is one of the five Italian autonomous regions with a special status. According to Eurostat, Sicily belongs to the category of less developed regions in Europe (GDP/head < 75% of EU-27 average) and recorded a youth unemployment rate of 40.1% in 2021 (against a country average of 22.3%).

Sicilian communities

The target communities identified by Association ATIS are all located in the territory of the region of Sicily. More specifically, two groups of communities have been identified: three municipalities in the territory of Palermo Province, namely Alia, Lercara Friddi and Terrasini, and two in the Province of Trapani. The proximity of Alia, Lercara Friddi and Terrasini to Palermo has led most young people to move to the larger city finding more chances for employment opportunities. The first two municipalities are located in the Sicilian hinterland: in Alia, the main economic activities are agriculture and sheep farming, but recently also tourism; Lercara Friddi was a vital mining center whose activities terminated in 1964; the community has therefore lost a major source of employment. In Terrasini, the leading economic sectors are tourism and fishing. Additionally, a significant role is played by agriculture, thanks to the mild Mediterranean climate.

Figure 1. The coastal town of Terrasini in the Province of Palermo (Bentivegna, 2013)



The second group of communities includes the municipalities of Erice and Castelvetro. The first is a well-preserved medieval town on the island's northeast coast that lives mainly on fishing and tourism. The other community identified in the Province of Trapani is called Castelvetro. The economy is based predominantly on farming, with the cultivation of vines and olive trees being the main focus. Young people living in these small towns, if not adequately supported by local organizations and institutional bodies to cultivate interests or undertake specific training activities, can only aspire to occasional jobs or move to other contexts that offer more employment opportunities. The loss of old trades and the difficulty in becoming self-employed often make migration the only opportunity to create a future for oneself.

Figure 2. The medieval town of Erice in the Province of Trapani (Lizziero, 2017)



4. KEY FINDINGS

Driving forces external to the labor market

The analysis reveals that in Sicily and Italy in general, *automation* is leading to a polarization of work; the professions most at risk are those that require medium skill levels, while high- and low-skill professions are suffering less from the effect of this transformation. As a result, automation does not present a significant obstacle during job search for young people who start with low-skill jobs. On the contrary, recent analyses (Bannò, Filippi, & Trento, 2021) show that automation could affect young people employed in professions requiring medium skill levels, leading to a slowdown in career growth due to task reduction and a decrease in pay. The impact of automation is relative to the context of reference; the professions in which aesthetic, social and personal judgment (such as cook, hairdresser, or psychologist) play an important role will likely not be penalized. In addition, automation and robotics will bring work to many young people who decide to enter this field, as there will be an increase in need of workers able to construct these machines.

Regarding *globalization*, another driving force of youth employment, the data collected reveals that it has produced an unprecedented level of structural uncertainty (Blossfeld, Dirk Hofacker, Rizza, & Bertolini, 2011). Specifically, globalization has made it possible for companies to adapt to new flexible forms of work. In Italy, risk and precariousness have mainly concentrated on the weakest groups in the labor market (with young people being among the most affected). Consequently, young people's reaction was to postpone most of the long-term binding decisions in private life, stay longer in the school system and combine their studies with part-time work. Moreover, young people today find themselves having to accept increasingly precarious jobs because of the presence of foreigners who accept the same jobs for lower wages.

Driving forces internal to the labor market: demand for workers

Concerning the *state of the economy*, Italy has been struggling with stagnant economic growth for the past 20 years, both from macroeconomic shocks and internal problems, which negatively affect an already weakened labor market and limit job growth, threatening youth employment. Fewer and fewer companies are willing to recruit new

staff and invest in their training. This is probably the result of employers' defensive attitude, preferring to take advantage of young workers by offering meager or no wages to compensate for the general crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic certainly did not help. The labor market will take longer to recover than previously thought, with unemployment levels set to remain under pre-COVID-19 levels until at least 2023 due to uncertainty about the course and duration of the pandemic (International Labour Organization, 2022).

Young people in Italy are also affected by the quality of entry-level jobs and the *type of contracts*, more specifically. From a survey carried out in 2021 on a sample of 960 young people aged 18-35 by the National Youth Council (in Italian: *Consiglio Nazionale Giovani, CNG*), it is observed that most of them have a salary of less than 10 thousand Euros per year (23.9% less than 5 thousand euros and 35% between 5 and 10 thousand Euros), 33.7% of the sample receives between 10 and 20 thousand Euros, while only 7.4% of cases exceed 20 thousand Euros. This is mainly the result of precarious contracts. Additionally, *informal work* represents a further obstacle. In general, forms of undeclared work are more typically used to employ people amongst the weakest categories, such as youth.

Driving forces internal to the labor market: supply of workers

The *poor skills of job-seekers* in Italy have been referred to as a real national emergency regarding the level of education of adults. Almost 13 million 25-64 year-olds have no more than an eighth-grade education. According to Eurostat's Regional Yearbook 2020 (2019 data), this corresponds to a vast group of Italians represented by 37.8% of all adults in that age group. This average percentage jumps to a rate close to one in two in some regions such as Sicily (48.2%). This trend exists partly because the Italian economic ecosystem is dominated by micro-enterprises that do not require highly educated workers. This tends to inhibit incentives for the accumulation of human capital (Merler, 2020). From the data collected, it emerged that young job-seekers in Italy often lack soft skills and coping abilities.

The *type of education* also seems to affect youth employment in Italy. According to the 2016 report by the National Agency for the Evaluation of the University System and Research (in Italian: *Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca, ANVUR*), the main problem of Italian universities lies in the fact that the offer of degree courses is highly theoretical; in Italy, there are no immediately professionalizing degree courses as there are in other European countries (e.g., Germany). According to the report, Italian graduates are holders of a diploma with a predominant theoretical content, typical of traditional university education. The external stakeholder interviewed emphasized that this issue is more pronounced in Southern regions (e.g., Sicily) due to the weak presence of enterprises on the territory.

According to recent research by the Boston Consulting Group (2020), the *skills mismatch* (i.e., the discrepancy between the skills sought by employers and the skills that individuals possess) is a global phenomenon. In Italy, the gap is considerable because there is, on the one hand, a shortage of graduates (which makes the Italian supply workforce underqualified) and, on the other hand, an excess of overqualified graduates (especially in scientific disciplines with particularly sought-after skills) that do not find outlets in Italy and are forced to emigrate abroad. Instead, most surplus occupations can be found in low-skilled jobs in tourism, construction, and

manufacturing. The problem of the misalignment between qualifications and demand for skills in the labor market begins already from the choices taken by high school students, which are often based more on individual or family preferences than on real professional opportunities. This trend continues when students evaluate different degree courses.

Demographic factors also play a role in finding and retaining work in Italy. When assessing the labor status of NEET youth in Italy and across the EU, the gender variable continues to play a significant influence. While young men are more likely to be unemployed (searching for work), young women are more likely not to seek a job actively. According to a report by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2016), these discrepancies are due to the traditional position of the woman in the family system. Women are more likely than men to stay at home and care for children or elderly people. As noted in a 2021 report published by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies (in Italian: *Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali*), foreign women are increasingly penalized and significant differences are also recorded between different sectors and communities. The report shows that all other things being equal, foreigners are more likely than Italians to lose their jobs. The risk is most significant for young foreign women with a low level of education, employed in low-skill professions, and residents in the southern regions.

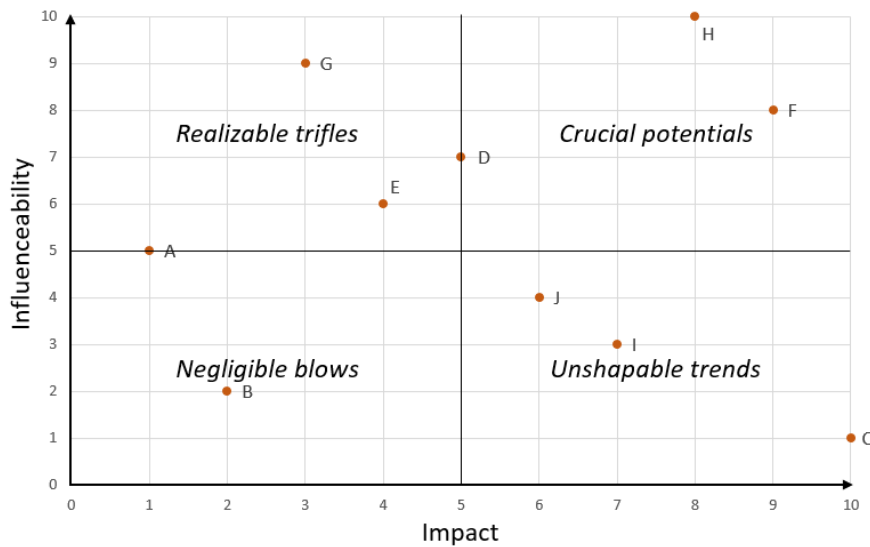
Finally, extant research (Braga & Checchi, 2010) has highlighted how *socioeconomic factors* influence youth employment in Italy through the concept of "added value". This indicator measures the progress of learning between the level at the entrance and the level at the exit from a school institution compared with that achieved by the pupils of another institution net of the characteristics of the socio-cultural baggage of the students. It is thus possible to highlight the quality of educational institutions and the role of family origin. The study shows that the territorial differences do not diminish throughout the school career and that positive added value attenuates the role played by socioeconomic characteristics. Vice-versa, southern Italy's negative added value regions are those characterized by a school system in which family and background characteristics exert a more significant impact on skill formation. This suggests that schools, when effective, can attenuate the differences that originate from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

The impact/influenceability matrix

Based on the analysis, all ten driving forces were classified in one of the four quadrants of the impact/influenceability matrix, as shown in Figure 3 below.² Firstly, according to the data collected, 'negligible blows' include A. Automation and B. Globalization since these driving forces are considered to have a low impact on youth employment and are difficult to influence. Secondly, in the left upper corner of the matrix, D. Type of contracts, E. Informal work, and G. Type of education make up the category of 'realizable trifles'. Thirdly, I. Demographic factors, J. Socioeconomic factors, and C. State of the economy have been classified in the quadrant, 'unshapable trends' since they scored high on impact and low on influenceability. Finally, two driving forces have been identified as 'crucial potentials' and, therefore, represent prospects for action: F. Poor skills of job-seekers, H. Skills mismatch, shown in the upper right quadrant of the matrix. We explore these in more detail in the next section.

² For the sake of simplicity, left/lower quadrants were preferred when driving forces were astride two quadrants.

Figure 3. Impact/influenceability matrix



5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Crucial potentials

As this report shows, young persons in Italy face many obstacles with regard to finding and retaining employment. We investigated barriers to youth employment deriving from forces external to the labor market, such as automation and globalization as well as internal factors playing a significant role in shaping the supply of labor and those affecting the demand for workers. It should be noted that even though external factors are driven by external stimuli, including technological advances and international trade, governments can influence them through policies like tax incentives, tariffs, and quotas, for instance. Thanks to this potentials assessment, we identified two highly impactful and influenceable factors to provide career support for NEETs: the *poor skills of job-seekers* and the *skills mismatch*. This section describes the key findings implications and suggests potential next steps for Association ATIS.

Regarding needs related to the poor skills of job-seekers, it is essential to highlight that young adults in Italy are often not highly educated. This calls for support in guiding adult school leavers with low educational attainment through local access possibilities to learning in formal education and vocational training. Such services would allow young adults to recover interrupted studies or start new courses to reach a high school diploma at local evening schools. Additionally, organizations such as Association ATIS might want to address the poor skills of job-seekers by providing opportunities to build specific emotional capabilities, especially in terms of soft skills development that relate to work (interpersonal and communication skills, time management, and empathy, among others). Forms of this type of support might include training, coaching, and community development groups who come together to create healthy communities as many careers require consistent, if not constant, interaction with other people.

Finally, considering needs arising from the skills mismatch, our analysis reveals that the problem is not only linked to the type of qualifications (low versus high), but it has to do with the contents and topics of the qualifications chosen too. Career counselors at

Association ATIS should follow Italy's mismatch priority occupations when developing training courses and curricula that offer technical skills. Additionally, the context and environment of the identified Sicilian communities should be considered and the local needs prioritized. Given the lack of enterprises in the Sicilian rural areas chosen, young adults should be supported in discovering social, technical, natural and economic resources around them. This would help enhance rural areas' human and social capital to boost community-led rural innovations.

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APPENDIX

StayOn: a community-based and driven project

Study: Potentials assessment

Questionnaire and Interview guidelines

Introduction and instructions:

With this analysis, we intend to generate knowledge about the context in which Stay-on's participants live. More specifically, we aim to examine current and future labor market needs and identify potentials for implementing possible support solutions. All information collected during our research will be treated confidentially. The data collected will enrich impact management CLUSTER 4, *Outcome indicators Group F*. We will share the results of this study in a report which is part of activity 3.2.10, as foreseen in the project proposal.

Data collection will happen in two steps:

I Questionnaire: One person per each project partner (project partner's contact) is responsible for identifying at least ONE external stakeholder and, in consultation with him/her/them, fill the questionnaire. External stakeholders can be - but are not limited to - public officials and other public servants (e.g., mayors, council members, politicians), young people not in employment nor education and their families, youth workers, and business owners in the community or communities of interest.

II Interview: The project partner's contact should schedule an online interview with researchers at the ECSF between 23.02.2022 and 16.03.2022. During the interview, the external stakeholder should also be present. The interview will last between 30 and 60 minutes and will revolve around the information provided in the questionnaire. The interview can be held in English (or Italian) and might require the project partner's contact to help researchers with translations if the external stakeholder/s do not speak either one of these languages.

The deadline for the submission of the questionnaire is 22.02.2022.

Please, send it to: giulia.parola@ecsocfin.com and mine.tulu@ecsocfin.com

Thank you for your input and contribution to this study!

1. General information

Project partner (*insert the organization's name and country*):

Questionnaire filled on (*insert the date*):

Interview scheduled on (*insert the date*):

Project partner's contact (*insert name, surname, and contact details of the person filling the questionnaire*):

External stakeholder (*insert name, surname, organization's name, contact details of the person present in the interview, and role in the implementation phase - if any*):

2. Community or communities of interest

(insert name of the village/s chosen for the implementation phase, indicate the geographical location within the country and the main economic activities):

3. Driving forces of youth unemployment

The following table lists ten driving forces of youth unemployment according to literature (*read the table and think how these driving forces relate to the labor market in your community or communities of interest*):

Driving forces	Explanation
A. Automation	Process of substituting technology for human labor to perform specific tasks or jobs
B. Globalization	Migratory patterns of young people from rural areas into urban areas
C. State of the economy	General economic situation at the national and regional levels
D. Types of contracts	Typical job arrangements available for young people (e.g., temporary contracts)
E. Informal work	Working off the books can affect and distort unemployment levels as it represents a social safety net for those who are unemployed
F. Poor skills of job-seekers	This refers to poor educational systems producing adults who are not particularly highly skilled
G. Type of education	This refers to secondary education systems with fragile links with the labor market (usually, students have little-to-no practical experience and competencies)
H. Skills mismatch	Discrepancy between the skills that are sought by employers and the skills that young people possess
I. Demographic factors	Some demographic factors such as gender, disability, ethnicity have shown closer links to youth unemployment
J. Socioeconomic factors	Socioeconomic variables such as educational attainment, migration backgrounds, and household income play a role in young people's ability to access the labor market

3A. Does AUTOMATION affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role does it play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3B. Does GLOBALIZATION affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role does it play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3C. Does the STATE OF THE ECONOMY affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role does it play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3D. Do the TYPE OF CONTRACTS affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role do they play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3E. Does INFORMAL WORK affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role does it play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3F. Do the POOR SKILLS OF JOB-SEEKERS affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role do they play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3G. Does the TYPE OF EDUCATION affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role does it play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3H. Does SKILLS MISMATCH affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role does it play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3I. Do DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role do they play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3J. Do SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role do they play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

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4. "Impact" ranking

(Please, considering the driving forces' impact on the community or communities of interest, rank them from 1 to 10, from 1=most impactful to 10=least impactful, typing a number in the second column):

Driving forces	"Impact" ranking
A. Automation	
B. Globalization	
C. State of the economy	
D. Types of contracts	
E. Informal work	
F. Poor skills of job-seekers	
G. Type of education	
H. Skills mismatch	
I. Demographic factors	
J. Socioeconomic factors	

5. "Influenceability" ranking

(Please, considering your organization's ability to the driving forces' impact on the community or communities of interest, rank them from 1 to 10, from 1=most easily influenced to 10=least easily influenced, typing a number in the second column):

Driving forces**“Influenceability” ranking**

A. Automation**B. Globalization****C. State of the economy****D. Types of contracts****E. Informal work****F. Poor skills of job-seekers****G. Type of education****H. Skills mismatch****I. Demographic factors****J. Socioeconomic factors**

6. Final comments

(Are there any other driving forces affecting youth employment in the community of communities of interest that have not been mentioned in the questionnaire? If yes, please indicate them and add any other comments you consider useful to this study’s objectives):

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