

Industrial RElations and Social Dialogue for an Economy and a Society "4.0" (IRESD4.0)

Recommendations on addressing smart working and on-the-job digital skills development within CLAs and social dialogue practices

Deliverable 4.2

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D4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS ON ADDRESSING SMART WORKING AND ON-THE-JOB DIGITAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT WITHIN CLAS AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE PRACTICES

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KEY MESSAGES

- If properly directed through social dialogue and social initiatives, innovation will produce positive effects on the market and society. Innovation will also play a major role when dealing with sustainable development, demographic challenges, and health-related risks. Furthermore, it is crucial to enhance social dialogue between EU Member States, industrial relations actors, employers, and educational and training bodies, in order to foster innovation in large-sized companies but also in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), given their relevance in the European and global economy.
- After the Covid-19 pandemic, it has become clear how remote work - with the different features that this organizational model can acquire in different national contexts - will play a crucial role for what concerns the future of work in Italy and Europe. Its potential benefits are several, both on the companies' (increase in productivity; cost reduction; innovation of organizational models) and the workers' (time and space flexibility; increase in work-life balance) side. Moreover, remote work could represent an important step towards the shift from time-based to performance-based employment relations. In light of the mentioned elements, social dialogue and collective bargaining appear the most suitable methods not only to govern and regulate it, but also to fully exploit its potential.
- It is for the national social partners to deal with employee training. In this sense, they need to consider workers and employers' needs, e.g., new tasks and assignments, technologies, and occupational transitions. This goal is to be achieved through constant exchanges and dialogue with the public and private research institutions, but also national and local public authorities – depending on the sector. Training institutes and education system players should be involved as well.
- In light of the different characteristics and necessities of the metallurgy workforce, the social partners agree that a one-size-fits all approach to digital skills training is not appropriate. A number of initiatives can be put forward to achieve the same goals. Among them are paid leave to undergo training –if provided for by legislation or collective bargaining, personal training accounts or training funds – which are determined at a sectoral or cross-sectoral level – vouchers and the likes. Yet these measures should be all-encompassing and work in different contexts. One requirement for this to happen is that prospective beneficiaries and the social partners alike are made well aware of their implementation (for example through effective training).

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RECOMMENDATIONS

To Member States

- It is strongly recommended that Member States liaise with the social partners to make sure resources are allocated to sound skills training for all workers, while improving adult education and training. This will help to meet the new EU headline target of 60% of adults participating in training every year by 2030, together with the Digital Decade target of 80% of EU population with at least basic digital skills by 2030. This is particularly relevant when considering that, according to the latest edition of the DESI Index, over 70% of businesses have said that the lack of staff with adequate digital skills is an obstacle to investment.
- With the active and structured participation of the social partners, Member States should set in motion Recovery and Resilience schemes to ensure access to quality and inclusive training to the widest possible audience of employees and employers of all ages, qualification level and also avoiding gender imbalances. These funds should support the social partners in improving the way training funds work.
- In promoting Covid-19 recovery, and facing the challenges linked to economic and geopolitical turmoil, Member States need to work with the social partners when reviewing digital skills strategies. This is true for high-level and basic-level digital skills, so the resources made available by the EU should be used (i.e. the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the Digital Europe Program, or the Cohesion Funds). A funding mechanism for training initiatives rewarding companies more inclined towards social dialogue should be implemented: thus, public funding should come with strong strings attached (i.e., notably, involvement of social partners).
- Member States should ensure that remote work can be a viable tool for the innovation of companies' organizational models and to increase workers' work-life balance levels. In order to achieve these objectives, EU financial resources and support should be used, in particular the Recovery and Resilience Facility, but also the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF Digital), to provide sufficient and accessible digital infrastructure in all regions whose connectivity levels are deemed inadequate by national and European institutions.
- To complement the work initiated with the DESI index, Member states, in close collaboration with Eurostat and with other bodies and agencies responsible for the collection and analysis of statistical information,



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should collect and provide European companies and citizens with reliable data regarding the topic of digital skills and companies' digital intensity levels. This is especially needed in light of the fact that current data regarding the number of ICT professionals in Member States might not be accurate, especially for what concerns SMEs, and therefore might not reflect their actual level of digitalization. The reasons for this are that smaller companies mostly outsource their IT services, rather than having an internal worker invested with that specific task; in addition, in SMEs ICT specialists are mostly self-employed, and their services are usually shared by many companies as a result. Moreover, an increase in the collection of cross-cutting data (considering various demographic and territorial level indicators such as geographical area of influence, age, gender etc.) could help identifying where the main improvements could be done, and which groups have more potential for upskilling, allowing to deliver more tailored and better targeted activities.

- Building from the pandemic experience, national regulations regarding remote work should be simplified,¹ so as to enhance the flexibility connected to the instrument and reduce bureaucratic burdens on companies -notably SMEs- which decide to implement it. Moreover, national level bodies should be instituted to the end of periodically monitoring remote work implementation.

To the European Commission

- Sound investment, reforms and social dialogue should be guaranteed by the EC in order to promote digital skills development, in keeping with the 1st principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights on the right to training and lifelong learning. In this connection, the Commission should prompt Member States to follow this principle when implementing the actual stages of national recovery and resilience plans (depending on their state of fulfillment) and the Council recommendation on VET, Osnabruck Declaration, EU Skills Agenda, Digital Education Action Plan, and the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training 2021-2030, and, last but not least, exploit the 2023 [European Year of Skills](#).
- The European Commission should invest in increasing digital sovereignty of the European Union (for example, to reduce its dependence on technology devices coming from companies not headquartered in

¹ It should be pointed out that while writing this document, negotiations among European cross-sectoral social partners are in place concerning a new regulation of telework as per their new Social Dialogue Work Programme 2022 – 2024.



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Europe – and to foster the EU ICT and metallurgy industry performances). This would have a positive effect on the general level and quality of digitalization of European manufacturing companies, since, if provided with an adequate level of digital skills, would be able to make informed choices regarding which technological devices they could and/or should include in their production processes.

- The statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat) should take into account the distinctive features of SMEs and micro-companies while collecting and analyzing data regarding digital skills, following the same methods suggested for Member States' statistical bodies. Therefore, the European Commission should provide additional updated data relying on meaningful metrics on digitalization in SMEs and micro-companies, which considers their specific features.

To social partners

- National social partners should work together to promote access to digital skills training, to meet workers' and enterprises' needs in the context of Covid-19 recovery, as well as sustainable economies and digitalization. Social dialogue and collective bargaining at different levels should play a more active role in the most needed areas – SMEs. National social partners, benefitting from realizable information concerning tools and good practices from all across Europe, could be entitled -and trained- to use EU and national funding. At cross-industry and/or sectoral level, social partners should come up with actions that contribute to workforce adaptation to digital and green transitions.
- Social partners should promote the use of blended instruments in order to offer workers training modules aimed at increasing their digital skills – and flexible learning paths. These modules should answer to their specific training needs: learning outcomes and skills acquired should be promoted and easily transferable thanks to validation and certification tools recognised at European level.
- National social partners and governments should seek to set aside funds to support training and innovation. These funds can promote digital skills development useful for employers and workers alike. Well-established training funds and coordination with the new instruments associated with the Recovery and Resilience plans (i.e., New Skills fund) are frequently co-managed by the social partners. If not, they should be promptly engaged in the governance of these tools. Training resources promote quality, effective and inclusive life-

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long learning, and employee training, helping workers to innovate and use their skills either when working or looking for a new job in different sectors.

- National social partners should cooperate more to disseminate skills strategies through effective social dialogue. They should also work with companies' recruiting departments and education and training providers to streamline the process of finding qualified profiles in line with market needs. Social partners should take part in skills and labour market intelligence (e.g., on skills forecasting, update of occupational profiles, etc.) in order to bring together market needs and education and training curricula and qualifications, making sure workers and employers anticipate and support changes and innovation in the context of green and digital transitions. This move will prompt larger and smaller enterprises to be more innovative and productive, while giving rise to quality jobs and working conditions. In brief, synergies with the education and training sector and companies should cover the anticipation of skills needs and quality training. This is essential to support workers' employability.
- National social partners should prepare adequate training initiatives for workers' representatives and small and medium-sized entrepreneurs to increase their awareness regarding the functioning of workers' training funds and at the same time to make them more active in designing tailored training modules and paths for specific business contexts. Adequate training of social partners (both workers' and employers' representatives) could ensure a more effective social dialogue and a pivotal role of the parties in the design and management of training at company and sectoral level.
- National social partners should work together to implement the [Autonomous Framework Agreement on Digitalisation](#)² to manage the digital transition through a joint partnership approach. In doing so, they should dedicate specific attention to the topic of data processing in the workplace, implementing measures directed at safeguarding workers' privacy, in coherence with the provisions of EU Regulation 679/2016 (GDPR), namely article 88, which states that "Member States may, by law or by collective agreements, provide for more specific rules to ensure the protection of the rights and freedoms in respect of the processing of employees' personal data in the employment context".

² See [Report on the state-of-the-art regarding smart working and digital-skills development in social dialogue practices and CLAs](#), p. 42.

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- Employers' representatives' associations should foster specific initiatives to demonstrate the importance of digital innovation and digital skills training to small and medium entrepreneurs, in order for them to be able to effectively take advantage of EU and national funding (notably in the context of implementation of National Recovery and Resilience Plans) but also to exploit other opportunities offered by private and public organizations. Cross-sectoral collaboration between employers representing more digitally mature companies (e.g., ICT) and the ones from more traditional sectors is especially encouraged in order to set example and learn from good practices ongoing in the ICT sector, benefitting from peer-to-peer learning strategies.
- The management of remote work through social dialogue and collective bargaining should be fostered by social partners on a national and regional level. A participated approach to remote work is in fact crucial in order to successfully implement this "new way of working" in companies' organizational models, and to exploit its opportunities with regard to the improvement of workers' quality of life and companies' productivity. Company-level collective bargaining regarding remote work resulted to be strategic in order to meet the organizational needs of the specific production setting productive context.
- Social partners should address Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) risks regarding remote work in collective agreements. The joint efforts of trade unions and employers' representatives are indeed crucial to prevent the potential surge in psychosocial (e.g., isolation, increase in stress levels, burnout) and physical (e.g., musculoskeletal and vision problems) disorders among remote workers.

A focus on territorial and company-level social partners

- Territorial-level (i.e., at regional-level) social partners should foster initiatives aimed at addressing digital skills gaps within their territory of competence, through the collaboration with local governments and training institutions. The knowledge that local social partners have regarding the skill mismatches between the local workforce and the needs of local companies appears crucial to create tailored interventions on the issues.
- Social dialogue should be enhanced and promoted both before and during the implementation of remote working initiatives in manufacturing and digital companies, for example through the institution of joint

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committees on company level composed of workers' and firm representatives aimed at coming up with shared proposals on the matter.

- Given the traditional absence of workers' representatives' bodies in SMEs, territorial-level social partners should foster specific initiatives that could facilitate a collective approach to digital skills training and remote work in smaller companies. To this end, territorial-level collective bargaining should be promoted to provide companies without representative bodies a framework of reference for the management of digital skills training initiatives and remote work.

Insights from the European arena

- Social partners (both – national social partners and European ones who play an important role on further spreading information) should establish closer collaboration and take a more pro-active participation in the existing initiatives which promote digital re-skilling and upskilling. Initiatives like the European Digital Skills and Jobs Platform (including related tools, i.e., Pledge Viewer) and the Pact for Skills, are the ideal platforms for sharing good practices and getting inspiration from the existing initiatives, networking with renowned experts in the area as well as representatives from the stakeholder groups, etc. The exchange of good practices among the MSs and national players from different MSs is essential.
- Learning from the ongoing initiatives and better use the developed tools and resources, as well as the funding programs which are already available appears fundamental. Examples could include sectoral blueprints and recommendations, as well as training resources provided by the blueprint projects, or initiatives (i.e., Marie Curie actions) where researchers can get employed in the companies and support them with their skills and knowledge, in exchange of getting space and guidance to carry out their research, etc.
- More funding should be provided to encourage mobility and exchange of professionals, especially among ICT and less digitally mature sectors. The existing funds are currently individual-centric (hence, providing support to the individual only), but support should be given also to the hosting organizations which need resources to support an additional employee, get other colleagues to supervise and/or learn from a new employee, etc.

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- Quicker and easier recognition (validation and certification) of the ICT competences is very important – there is a growing need for commonly-recognized qualifications and matching with job profiles for all types of ICT professionals, including the ones in emerging technologies (which includes an easier recognition of skills acquired via non-formal, informal training and prior learning). The results should consider not only existing frameworks (such as e-CF) which are quite static and take long time to update, but also the results of the blueprint projects which are defining various needed competences (incl, ICT) and profiles in different ecosystems.
- Digital skills should not be regulated differently than all other skills that workers need to be equipped with to secure their employability (e.g., green skills), and should therefore constitute only a part, though essential, of reskilling and upskilling policies adopted at the European level.
- Trade unions should be involved in the regulation of telework to tackle its potential negative effects on European workers (invasive technological control, work-life blending etc.) and avoid the dismantling of the collective approach to work. To this end, when introducing new teleworking regulations through laws or collective agreements, the right to contact union representatives by teleworkers should be ensured, alongside their right to access the workplace.

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