



Press Release - *Employers and trade unions kick off joint work on labour agreements for the digital age*

- **ADAPT, together with the Italian employers' association Confimi Industria, DIGITAL SME and FIM Cisl Veneto, on March 25, 2021 took part at the kick-off meeting of a joint project funded by the European Commission to support social dialogue and industrial relations**
- Under the leadership of Confimi Industria (the Project coordinator), over 50 experts will be selected from national and European social partners to establish a **European stakeholder board**
- Focussing on **smart working** models and **digital skills**, the stakeholder board will work for 18 months and provide recommendations for upgrading labour agreements for an economy and a society 4.0

The COVID-19 crisis has caused a wave of rapid and comprehensive digitalisation at the workplace. Hundreds of thousands of businesses in Europe had to switch to remote-working models or shut their operations down entirely; the consequences on the labour market are still enormous, particularly for small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

If the crisis has shown one thing, it is that **digitalisation has come to stay**. Modern workplaces have to adapt to modern “smart working” models to do justice to the digital age. At the same time, current collective labour agreements in many European countries do not accurately reflect changes as a result of digitalisation.

Digitalisation increases businesses' resilience in hard-hit Bergamo

Last year, Confimi Apindustria Bergamo has supported businesses through the toughest time since the organisation's founding over 50 years ago. The employers' association, which nationally represents more than 40,000 companies that employ about a half-million people, helped businesses to navigate the extraordinarily difficult situation in Bergamo, which was among the regions hardest hit by COVID-19 in the world. *“Over the course of last year, digital technology allowed us to reconcile production with organisational requirements to protect personnel”*, remarked Paolo Agnelli, President of CONFIMI Industria. *“But measures implemented during an emergency are not enough, nor should teleworking be mistaken for smart working. We must work to ensure that the method is regulated in order to guarantee both flexibility and profitable business management.”*

As a result of their experience, Confimi Apindustria Bergamo is well-equipped to help companies understand the value of modernising their operations and starting their digitalisation journey. When trying to help businesses to survive the crisis, Confimilearned that many collective labour agreements do not accommodate remote working models. In Italy alone, there are over 800 national agreements, the majority of which do not reflect nor accommodate the digital reality of work today. This realisation provided the impetus to launch a new social dialogue support project, bringing together Italian and European experts, researchers, and social partners to discuss how outdated labour agreements could be upgraded to the digital age.

Smart working and digital skills for modern collective labour agreements

The new project will focus on two crucial improvements to collective labour agreements: smart working models and a strong emphasis on digital skills at the workplace. Modern labour agreements that reflect the digital reality of today will benefit both workers and businesses, especially SMEs. Regulated and fair work relations put both social partners at ease and allow Europe to scale up and grow to meet the demands of the digital economy of the future. The project will therefore strengthen the social dialogue by providing social partners with guidelines and recommendations to enhance smart working and digital skills development through social partner collaboration. It will also provide recommendations to comprehensively update collective labour agreements. *“We need to devise a new model of collective bargaining that is less confrontational and more synergistic, that takes into account the major issue of sustainability, and that manages to strike the right balance between social justice and business competitiveness”*, as Domenico Galia, President of CONFIMI Industria Digitale, put it. *“To achieve such a contractual model, a major cultural change is needed, as is the case for all social and economic processes.”*



Join the European stakeholder board for change!

The project partners **Confindustria** and **DIGITAL SME** will be joined by **ADAPT - Association for International and Comparative Studies in the field of Labour Law and Industrial Relations** and trade union **FIM-CISL Veneto**, and supported by **IndustriALL Europe**, an umbrella organisation representing independent and democratic trade unions. As a first step towards modernising labour agreements, partners will establish a European stakeholder board consisting of experts from employer and employee associations. The stakeholder board will carefully develop recommendations on how to include smart working provisions and a strong emphasis on digital skills development in labour agreements to ensure that businesses and workers benefit—in Italy and the whole of Europe!

If you are an expert in smart working models, digital skills, and labour agreements, and you want to participate in our international co-creation workshops, you can [apply to join the European stakeholder board here!](#)

Industrial relations and Social dialogue for an economy and a society “4.0” (IRSD-ES4.0) - Project Partners



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