



The action of European social partners in the construction industry for skills: towards a new Pact for Skills

by Silvia Rigano

On July 1st 2020, the European Commission presented a new updated version of the European Skills Agenda, based on the former one that was drafted in 2016.

This new Agenda, which is to be implemented in the next 5 years, set quantitative targets in terms of upskilling (the enhancement of existing skills) and reskilling (requalification path for the development of new skills) of people.

In fact, the Commission has identified four quantitative indicators that, in percentage terms, define the objectives to be achieved in the five-year period.

The first indicator, which refers to the participation of adults aged 25-64 in learning paths, should be increased by 32% in order to reach quota 50% by 2025. If compared to the second and third indicator, both referring to the same age group of the first one, the Commission made a distinction between percentages: for poorly skilled adults, it is required an increase of 67% to reach the goal set at 30%; for adults with recent learning experiences, it is required an increase of 82% in order to reach 20%. Finally, the fourth and last indicator refers to the percentage of adults aged 16-74 with basic digital skills: in this case, the percentage to be reached is 70% by 2025.

The goals set by the European Commission are certainly ambitious and they seem to be even more challenging if one focuses on the individual Italian percentages.

Compared to the first indicator, the percentage of adults (25-64) who participated in learning paths between 2011 and 2016 is below 40%, whereas for what concerns the second indicator, the percentage does not reach quota 20%. With regards to the third indicator the percentage is below 5% but reaches 42% for the fourth one.

Nevertheless, overall data of European countries are not encouraging. Therefore, the Commission has decided to elaborate a Plan in order to promote the development of individual skills, involving social partners, companies or other public/private organizations as well, regional/local partnerships and educational institutions. A further endeavor on these issues was made necessary by the commitment to making Europe climatically neutral, the ongoing digital transformation and the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. In fact, skills are considered to be essential to the recovery after the coronavirus pandemic and their development forms the basis of the new European industrial strategy.

The Agenda focuses, in particular, on three principles:

- The training and requalification processes should support the green and digital transition, but also the European recovery from the coronavirus crisis;
- People should be capable of developing “employment skills” via education and professional training;
- The access to ongoing training should be necessarily guaranteed.
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The Agenda is composed of 12 Actions; the first action includes the signing of several sectorial “Pacts for Skills”, aimed at increasing and redefining the workforce in order to promote the green and digital transition.

In this context there is the action of European social partners of the construction sector which, through social dialogue, started working to adopt a “Constructions Chart”.

The initiative was created the day after the Round Table held in November 27th 2020, chaired by Commissioners Schmit and Breton and with the participation of entrepreneurs, social partners and research, educational and professional training organizations.

The construction sector was defined as an “essential ecosystem” to face the challenges that the European Union will have to deal with, in particular the one connected with climate change. Nevertheless, the construction sector does not really appeal to youngsters and this perception can only be changed through new training methods – based on research and applied in a flexible way – together with digitalization. Moreover, this sector is characterized by a significant mobility, often impeded by the lack of a mutual recognition of qualifications among EU member states, due to some differences among their training systems.

With regard to these issues, the role played by social partners in planning and implementing skills programs on a national and local level is crucial and the construction sector proved to be ready to welcome the initiative of the European Commission.

FIEC (European Construction Industry Federation) on behalf of 33 European employers’ federations and EFBWW (European Federation of Building and Woodworkers), as a trade union for workers in the industry of construction, wood, forestry and the like, have always paid great attention to the training needs of the industry.

The problems connected with the lack of qualified workforce and the skills mismatches are at the very center of the European social dialogue of constructions which involves individual federations and trade unions on a national level. Hence, the common willingness to lay the foundation for a future “Pact for sectoral skills” which aims at achieving quantitative and qualitative goals in line with the Agenda.

The partners acknowledge the importance of the skills in a peculiar industry, such as the construction one which is characterized by a significant fragmentation of production. The aim is to promote a dialogue between the member federations in order to draft a shared document, based on the principles specified by the Commission, i.e.: a) promoting the ongoing training culture; b) building sound partnerships which involve sectoral stakeholders as well; c) monitoring the trend of the labor supply and demand and anticipating the skills need; d) working jointly against discriminations and in order to promote gender equality and equal opportunities.

Therefore, the role played by European social partners consists in coordinating and directing a common action which can be adjusted to the needs of each member State, in order to carry out projects that are targeted and in line with the training needs.

Moreover, the involvement of European social partners of the sector in several skills development initiatives, launched by the European Commission (inter alia, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships), is important as well.

The institute is considered to be a fundamental tool to promote an effective school-job transition and to increase the availability of qualified workers. For this purpose, FIEC and EFBWW encouraged the development of partnerships in apprenticeship, promoting and spreading best practices among the countries participating in the social dialogue, in order to enhance the awareness of IeFP systems.

In order to face the upcoming challenges of the sector, it is crucial for social partners to continue their cooperation, working jointly to facilitate the training of an adequately qualified workforce. The construction sector is still recovering and it is essential to detect the skills need in order to avoid the mismatch between labor supply and demand.).

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