



Green skills in VET – A European project on green skills and vocational training in the public service sector kicks off

by Sara Prodocimi, Margherita Roiatti

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Tuesday 6th July 2021 SGI Europe and the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) held the [launching conference of the project “Green Skills in VET”](#), co-funded by the European Commission¹ that aims at supporting services of general interest providers (SGIs) and the educational and professional training organizations in order to improve the connection between supply and demand of “green” skills that are suitable to enable and achieve the objectives of the green transition.

In fact, the two-year project aims at identifying the green skills needs and the key professional profiles (also in a forward-looking perspective) and at proposing innovative solutions for an effective supply in terms of vocational training dedicated to the development of the skills that are requested by the labor market transitioning towards the climate neutrality, with a particular focus on transport, energy and water industries.

Responsibility is the key word, as Valeria Ronzitti (Secretary General of SGI Europe) has underlined: in order to transform the [European Green Deal](#) from a mere potential objective to an authentic action plan, it is necessary to verify and identify the current and future demands of skills and expertise for each sector, by determining any mismatch between the in-demand skills and the learning supply and, consequently, by implementing a professional development of the personnel compatible with the “new green skills” in order to fully achieve the objectives of the Green Deal.

Key actors in the green transition, among others and together with social partners, will surely be the European institutions that participated in the opening meeting of the project in the person of Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights. His speech highlighted multiple times the urgent need for a new and changed approach to the [vocational education and training](#) compared to the current and future economic model and to climate changes which, together with the demographic dynamics and the technological determinant, are the main drivers of the labor change and transformation. In fact, if on one hand the green transition could generate 1.2 million jobs in the EU within 2030, on the other hand, this objective clearly can only be achieved with the training, in terms of “Life-long learning”,

¹ [Grant Agreement No. VS/2021/0017.](#)

reskilling, upskilling of expertise and via the consequent fact that workers will acquire the skills that are demanded by companies (in particular, referring to SGIs, which are focused on by the project in question, particularly interested in the dynamics of the green transformation and in the sustainability objectives in a broad sense). **Green transition comes as an excellent opportunity for development to governments, companies and workers, but it will require to be necessarily supported by policies protecting production and employment, in order to have full support from the labor market and the economy towards the ongoing transformations.**

Chiara Riondino, Head of Unit in charge of VET, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning, DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, of the European Commission, claimed that the entire project is part of a wider **European pillar on social rights**, which aims to **build a stronger, more equal and inclusive Europe**. Creating skills compatible with the transitioning labor market means making the transformation as fair and inclusive as possible.

Valeria Ronzitti replied underlining that **the employers involved in the project are responsible for making the Green Deal a reality**, by offering ever greener and more sustainable services and by trying to anticipate the current and future needs of the corporate world, in order to raise awareness and, subsequently, guide the productive world towards **an always “greener” production and professional training culture**.

Similarly, in the introduction, **Daniel Wisniewski**, EFEE General Secretary, has declared that the **current situation, affected by the coronavirus pandemic, has accelerated the ecological transition, made possible by the technological transition as well**. Therefore, if raising awareness on environmental sustainability will be a necessary step, at the same time it will be crucial to effectively implement policies that support change and that can promote social welfare during this transitional phase and for the years to come. **All stakeholders will necessarily have to be involved**: the green transition implies some employment challenges, for which one of the main answers may come from the training world so that “no worker is left behind”. **Professional skills and, in particular, green skills, would eventually be the springboard for this new economy: the more they will adjust to the environmental and transformation needs and objectives, the more they will be employed effectively in the labor world** with positive results for every productive and territorial ecosystem.

The first panel of the conference then focused on the analysis of the progresses made on the subject of green skills and vocational training through slideshows shown by some researchers of the ADAPT Foundation that, as an external expert, supports the partners of the project in carrying out a research ad hoc focusing on the aforementioned topics.

According to Emmanuele Massagli, the ongoing transformations in the labor world require a holistic approach: technology, by itself, would not be enough to guarantee an adequate transition towards a sustainable economy which, in order to be complete, should balance the instances – oftentimes conflicting – of environmental protection, social equity and economic balance. For all the three aspects, it is particularly crucial the investment on workers’ skills: it is necessary to promote, within labor contexts, an authentic “absorption capacity” of the innovations connected with the green transition. According to Massagli, *“The skills of the workers enable the transformation and allow a socially acceptable administration*

of the latter. People are always at the very center of the economy: they are the main actors of the “green” transition. Investing in people’s skills means, first of all, rethinking pedagogical methods and training contents. The entire training, without adjectives: this challenge concerns both the initial training and the ongoing training; both the general education and the vocational one; both youngsters during their compulsory training and adults involved in a path of professional qualification and requalification.”

Among the aspects that the research is going to analyze, one issue concerns terminology and definition: which are the green skills? Are they technical and specialized or transversal? Or both of them? How are they identified and who identifies them? A second issue – directly connected with the former one – concerns how these skills are trained. It seems sensible to think, as the scientific literature has been stating for a long time, that a new way of working implies a new way of thinking which, again, requires a new way of training and learning and that therefore concerns both the paths offered to youngsters and adults and the skills of the trainers themselves, who must keep up to date in terms of contents and pedagogical methods. How are these skills trained? How are they valued and certified? Finally, an in-depth study concerning the main actors of the training will be necessary: what are companies and vocational training institutions doing in order not to lose the challenge of the green transition?

Referring to the online survey distributed as the first step of the research², Margherita Roiatti has shown the following preliminary evidence: those who answered the questionnaire (i.e., people who represent SGI providers and the world of vocational training) showed a good awareness of the topics of interest of the project, also with reference to the knowledge of local, national and European initiatives that aim to improve the matching between supply and demand in terms of skills and green professional profiles; **the obstacle in terms of definition proved to be significant, but it was possible to identify a certain uniformity of views about the importance of a sectorial approach for the detection of professional skills needs and about the opportunity of a better integration in the training programs both for what concerns technical green skills and transversal ones (the latter are also seen as an enabling determinant of a necessary change of mentality about sustainability’s topics).** As well as the problem of understanding what “green skills” actually means, it was found that the main obstacle to the cooperation between general-interest service companies and VET institutions is the lack of resources (especially, financial resources but also in terms of dedicated human asset): where collaborations (that are generally valued as effective) actually happen, they concern dual training experiences (in particular, apprenticeships) and co-designing of CVs and training programs. **In brief, the majority of those who answered the questionnaire has expressed the need for a better integration between training and work in order to manage the green transition and has claimed to be worried about the perception of a scarce “attractivity” of the energy, transport and water sectors as a problem for recruiting suitable professional figures in order to promote the green transition and, in general, as a cause of skills mismatches.**

Continuing with the analysis of the speeches given during the conference, it was clear that several industries, such as the electricity one, are particularly involved in the green

² At the time of writing, the questionnaire is still in its phase of administration and its results will be integrated via a series of in-depth interviews with a panel of selected observers.

transition: Jean-Michel Romann, social advisor for the Union Française de l'Électricité (French Electricity Union), has shown the results of [a two-year study concerning the anticipation of skills and labor needs on a sectorial level](#). Instead, Dominique Majoor, member of the executive committee of Koning Willelm I College, during her speech, offered the example of a college that, in order to raise awareness on the topics connected with climate change and environmental sustainability and in order to promote the education on these issues, has significantly invested on the improvement of its infrastructures as well, also involving firsthand the final year students (e.g., in the designing of classrooms and labs).

The second panel of the conference has then underlined how **important it is to enhance the institutional partnership in order to make the “green skills” a reality**.

Mara Brugia, Deputy Director of the European Center for the Development of Vocational Training, Cedefop, has underlined how a greener Europe will not undermine employment buy several industries, member States or regions may be affected negatively in terms of employment during the phase of transition. In this sense, the transition towards a sustainable economy will not only involve a more significant employment of renewable energy sources or circular economy actions, but in order to take full advantage of its benefits, **all the actors of the labor market will have the responsibility to act synergically in order to promote the connection between employment and environmental policies**, anticipating, in coordination with educational institutions, the professional needs and minimizing the risk of mismatching between the skills supply and demand.

As mentioned by Ludovic Voet, ETUC Confederal Secretary, the strategy of the industry of skills redefining will have to match the main objective, as well as promoting the climate sustainability goals, which involves supporting workers according to principles of inclusion, quality of training, validation and guiding during the transformation process. According to Voet, the environmental protection will have to go through the social protection of those who are involved in the green transition and affected by its consequences.

On one hand, the principle **“Leave no one behind”** is the central and transformative premise of the **2030 Agenda** for Sustainable Development (it is not possible to have a standardized strategy to be indistinctly applied to all workers, industries and European regions that are involved), on the other hand, as underlined by **Spiros Protopsaltis**, PES Network Vice president, once identified the green skills (whether they are technical or transversal), **it will be necessary to promote multilevel approaches and policies**, in order to draw up **strategies that are specific and personalized for the worker’s needs and for the needs of the corresponding sector**.

In conclusion, it is possible to state that, considering all the issues analyzed so far (definition for what concerns green skills; training linked to new learning methods and styles; organization connected with the main actors of the company and the training), in order to support the green transition, it is crucial to combine the theoretical study and research with the direct listening to those who live those challenges every day: companies and training institutions. The green skills training firstly requires an effort in terms of definition in order to build a common syntaxis to fully understand what the aforementioned expression means and that will be useful for a punctual and precise identification of needs. Once this is sorted out, **it will be necessary to rethink, innovate and renovate the connection**

between world of work and the training one, not only in terms of goals, but particularly in terms of learning methods that are chosen to create new professional figures and to effectively update those that already exist so that they will not suffer due to the significant ongoing transformation processes.

Sara Prodocimi

ADAPT Junior Fellow

 *@ProdocimiSara*

Margherita Roiatti

ADAPT Research Fellow

 *@MargheRoi*