



## Initial assessment of ETUC on the new European Commission's Policy Package on Skills and VET

### *CGIL, CISL and UIL Comments*

#### **1. What should be the priorities of the EU on VET for the next 5/10 years? Do you still agree with the 5 priorities of the Riga Conclusions or it should be updated?**

CGIL, CISL and UIL do agree with the Riga Conclusions and think that they are still current due to the persistence of critical issues, in particular regarding the IVET and the school/training-to-work transitions. We think that the promotion of dual learning, in all its forms and with the involvement of the Social Partners, is still a priority jointly with the consolidation of the national VET System; the development of quality assurance mechanisms and the need for more permeable systems.

With a view to updating the Riga Conclusions, **a further point should specifically concern young people**, explaining the need - also due to the strong impact of the Covid-19 crisis on youth employment - to support apprenticeship in IVET in order to enhance qualified transitions to the labor market.

In addition, we believe that the **priorities for the next 5-10 years** should concern<sup>1</sup> the following points:

- Raising educational attainment levels: improving effectiveness and guidance in school, IVET and university courses, also with the support of territorial bodies participated by the Social Partners, in order to reduce early school leaving, drop-outs and educational poverty and to strengthen IVET's attractiveness;
- Apprenticeship: promoting and enhancing apprenticeships, which are still little used, in IVET and in the "dual system";
- Tertiary VET: strengthening Higher Technical Education and Training (ITS pathways in Italy), with particular reference to green economy and digitalization;
- CVET: upskilling and reskilling the workers involved in job transformations and digitization processes through a National Training Plan, which also involves the Social Partners in particular through the Inter-professional Funds;

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In line with what has already been stated in the "Contributo di CGIL CISL UIL al rapporto della Confederazione Europea dei Sindacati per la consultazione sulle Relazioni Paese 2020".

- Lifelong Learning: building an integrated lifelong learning system in order to guarantee the right to learn throughout the life course, as required by the current regulation, which is largely unapplied in Italy;
- Skills recognition and validation: strengthening the tools for the recognition and validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning; making operational the National Guidelines on the Certification of Skills; enhancing the best practices promoted by the Social Partners in some sectors.

## **2. What is your opinion on the suggested Charter on key principles on upskilling and reskilling and the Pact for Skills? What would be your expectations from it? Do you agree with the ETUC list of key principles?**

CGIL, CISL and UIL do agree with ETUC's list of key principles. We think it is necessary to further specify the need for integrating passive and active labor policies, also by strengthening the latter. It is relevant to refer to the possibility of **financing workers' upskilling and reskilling** through ESI funds and other European funds to mitigate unemployment risk in emergencies, **in conjunction with the reduction of working hours** due to companies' changing production or organizational needs, enhancing the proactive role of workers' representatives and collective bargaining.

Linked to this and due to the changes that will affect the labor market – in terms of industrial demography and consequent loss of jobs – it is a priority to finance upskilling and reskilling courses for those **workers at risk of expulsion from the labor market and long-term unemployment**. With regard to this aspect, we emphasize that the Long Term Unemployed Recommendations have not been implemented yet in Italy.

A further point, which could complement point 1 (Effective Social Dialogue), should concern the need to **involve the Social Partners both in planning and monitoring the use of the ESI Funds for VET**.

### **General views on the proposals**

CGIL, CISL and UIL do agree with the ETUC's views on the proposals made by the Commission. In particular, we believe it is a priority that Member States define "effective upskilling and reskilling strategies within their national adult learning policies to support workers and the unemployed with quality and inclusive skills provision". Currently, a **"National Skills Guarantee Plan"** aimed at ensuring the right to lifelong learning, as stated in Law no. 92 of 2012, **has not yet been approved in Italy**.

We strongly agree with the need to oppose the Commission's tendency to emphasize individual responsibility for upskilling and reskilling. We think that the possibility of financing training hours in conjunction with the reduction of working hours can be a tool to **bring back the responsibility for upskilling and reskilling to the social dimension**.

Furthermore, we believe that **the Novel Skills Agenda should provide guidelines for the allocation of ESF resources that take CVTET into due consideration** (in Italy currently financed

only through Inter-professional Funds) in an integrated programming framework with other sources of financing. Efficient operating rules must preserve the specific nature of the contributions of the structures.

Regarding micro-credentials, we agree with the ETUC-ETUCE position of July 2, 2020 and we believe that also ETUC's Assessment should state that **micro-credentials must be subject to social dialogue on professional qualifications and collective agreements, and therefore strongly related to salary**. We think that any implementation of micro-credentials should be strictly regulated and controlled in order to avoid frustrating the long and complex work that has recently led to the approval of the Guidelines on the National System of Certification of Competences in Italy.

Considering the ongoing discussion on **Individual Learning Accounts** and the substantial failures of previous experiences in different contexts, we believe that the implementation of **NFIL validation services** is a fundamental pre-requisite for the design of personalized training measures. The planning of the individual training offer must also start from the skills developed in non-formal and informal contexts and must respond to the individual training needs and aspirations, thus guaranteeing and recognizing the subjective right to training.

Finally, we think it should be considered that the low levels of skills in the adult population in Italy should be related to the acquisition of basic skills in initial education. As shown by the OECD-PISA data, the share of 15-year-old underachievers is at worrying levels in Italy: 24% in mathematics; 26%, in science; 23% in reading. In the light of these facts, it is evident that the future challenges on skills could be better framed in the **Educational Poverty** perspective. The low levels of literacy, numeracy and digital skills; the low participation of adults in training activities; skills-mismatch and so on are symptomatic of the structural weaknesses of the Italian education system in terms of quality, inclusiveness and accessibility, which generate social and economic inequalities since the early years of life. **The Commission's policy package, in parallel with the "care approach", should open up to a "holistic approach"** to the development of skills that can interpret current issues and future challenges within the broader perspective of Educational Poverty. An awareness of the need for reforms with long-term objectives must be promoted among stakeholders (Governments, Social Partners, Education and Training Providers ...).

Therefore, we believe that the Novel Skills Agenda, the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on VET and "a Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation" must be linked, by **creating systemic connections and synergies, with the forthcoming Child Guarantee**. We believe that the reduction of educational poverty should start from education and training systems' inclusiveness and from their ability to emancipate by the narrow role of employability skills providers. Social and emotional skills and the ability to exercise active citizenship are key-elements for creating a common ground of awareness for the development of technical skills and for the challenges of the carbon neutral economy and the digital transitions.

**ETUC views on the idea of Renewed European Alliance for Apprenticeship**

As regards the Italian perspective, the strengthening of the EAfA must take in account the **relaunch the so-called “training apprenticeships”** (i.e. apprenticeships that lead to the achievement of a professional qualification, a high school diploma or a tertiary education qualification). Training apprenticeships are fundamental tools to facilitate young people's school/training-to-work transitions and to contrast and tackle the Early School Leaving in a country where the rate of ESL is still at 14% and the share of 15-24 years old NEETs stands at 18% (Eurostat, 2019).

Facts that are expected to grow in the coming months and years because of the economic crisis triggered by the Covid-19 emergency and because of the partial implementation in Italy, with deep territorial gaps, of distance learning due to structural weaknesses both in terms of access to technologies (network and devices) and of digital skills. We therefore believe that training apprenticeships can be an important tool to protect young people, especially the most vulnerable, from the effects of the crisis.