

Position Paper of the European Federation for Family Employment

Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills: an opportunity for the home employment sector

The economic crisis caused by the coronavirus has considerably weakened the European Union. The contraction of its GDP should reach 8.3% in 2020 instead of 7.4% as initially planned, due to the slow lifting of containment measures¹. Considering this historic recession, the recovery plan proposed by the Commission initiates the rebound of the European economy and paves the way towards a more sustainable model, integrating climate and digital issues.

Skills are the cornerstone of this twin transition. They guarantee the European resilience and social cohesion, while promoting the competitiveness and innovative capacity of the EU. Although education and training belong to its “supporting competences”, the EU has supported vocational education and training (VET) since a long time, according to the Copenhagen process².

The European Skills Agenda published on July 1, 2020³ completes the policies implemented in recent years and follows the Riga conclusions⁴. This document is an essential step towards the delivery of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which first principles is dedicated to education, training and lifelong learning. However, some major issues still have to be tackled such as the fragmentation of skills validation systems. In most cases, the offer is neither sufficient nor adapted to the needs of workers, who have only limited access to professionalisation. Undeclared work is one of the main obstacles to the implementation of the Council Recommendation of December 20, 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning⁵. In fact, it is very difficult to assess the impact of training schemes and skills recognition on populations that are not included in national or European statistics.

Home employment model (also known as direct employment) is characterized by a contractual work relationship between two private individuals, without intermediary or any profit/commercial purpose. This model is strongly marked by undeclared work. Although the pandemic has underlined its essential role, Member States too rarely support and promote this sector. Most domestic workers are characterized by a low level of qualification and yet, they usually have transversal skills that cover a large range of activities. The validation of these skills would not only enhance the attractiveness of the sector, it would also improve the living

¹ European Commission. (2020, 7 July). Summer 2020 Economic Forecast: An even deeper recession with wider divergences. Retrieved July 9, 2020 from https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1269.

² CEDEFOP. (2014, 1 November). Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training and the European Commission on enhanced European cooperation in VET. Retrieved July 9, 2020 from https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/copenhagen_declaration_en.pdf.

³ European Commission. (2020, 7 July). Communication – European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (2020). Retrieved July 9, 2020 from <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9723>.

⁴ CEDEFOP. (2015). European Ministers endorse Riga conclusions on VET. Retrieved July 9, 2020, from <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/european-ministers-endorse-riga-conclusions-vet>.

⁵ Council of the EU. (2012, 20 December). Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Retrieved July 9, 2020 from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>.

conditions of workers by promoting social integration through work and the quality of the provided services.

The Personal and household services sector would fully benefit from a Blueprint alliance. On the one hand, it would foster the cooperation and share of best-practices between the European actors engaged in this field. On the other hand, it would give around 8 million declared workers (4% of total employment) the opportunity to acquire new skills⁶. Finally, such an initiative would be in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, which recognises the right to education and vocational training for all.

I) The stakes generated by demographic changes

Ageing is one of the main issues raised by demographic changes within the European Union. According to Commission estimates, around 30% of European citizens will be aged 65 and over in 2070 compared to 20% today⁷. Therefore, it is necessary to design a recovery plan that includes the needs generated by such a trend.

The pandemic has increased the vulnerability of the elderly and strengthen short-term isolation. Besides, it has underlined the limits of our health systems, both in terms of funding and long-term care offer. Support and assistance policies cannot longer ignore the new demands of the elderly. In France, for example, more than 80% of people would prefer to stay at home until the end of their lives⁸. Many look for local alternatives, more pleasant and less expensive than the very often congested hospitals.

The Covid-19 crisis has also highlighted the impact of ageing on the employment market. The lack of qualified personal prevents from a sustainable improvement of our health systems. Therefore, the decreasing labour workforce among the whole European population will be a huge threat in the coming decades⁹. Nevertheless, this silver economy may foster social and technological innovation. Digital tools can indeed become a real growth lever, enhancing the quality and the quantity of care services¹⁰. This digitization has to include the population that are less represented on the labour market in order to tackle the stakes raised by ageing, such as women and migrants.

II) Home employment: a lever of inclusion

Thus, the gender employment gap was 11.5 percentage points in 2017¹¹. Even if we observe a gradual decrease of the curve, this difference has also been identified among the employed.

⁶ European Commission (2012). Personal and household services. Retrieved July 9, 2020 from <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1427&langId=en>.

⁷ Eurostat Statistics Explained. (2019, July). Structure et vieillissement de la population. Retrieved July 9, 2020 from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_structure_and_ageing/fr.

⁸ Institut Montaigne. (2015, June). Bien vieillir à domicile : accompagner les séniors. Retrieved July 9, 2020 from <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/ressources/pdfs/publications/favoriser%20le%20bien-vieillir.pdf>.

⁹ European Commission. (2018, May). The 2018 Ageing Report: Economic and Budgetary Projections for the EU Member States (2016-2070). Institutional Paper 079. Retrieved July 9, 2020 from https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/economy-finance/2018-ageing-report-economic-and-budgetary-projections-eu-member-states-2016-2070_en.

¹⁰ EIT. (2020, March). EIT Health and McKinsey: Transforming healthcare with AI. Retrieved July 9, 2020 from https://eithealth.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EIT-Health-and-McKinsey_Transforming-Healthcare-with-AI.pdf

¹¹ European Commission (2019, March 7), *2019 Report on equality between women and men in the EU*, p9. Retrieved July 9, 2020 from https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en#annual-report-on-equality-between-women-and-men

In fact, among employed women aged 15-64 in 2018, 35% were working part-time, compared with only 9.6% of employed men in the same age group¹².

Despite numerous awareness and education campaigns, women and men still do not have equal status on the labour market. The reproduction of traditional family models does barely allow an equitable sharing of family responsibilities. Besides, it fuels the stereotypes, which reduce women to their roles as mothers and make their profiles less attractive on the labour market.

Among the 308 million people aged between 18 and 64 living in the European Union, 106 million (34%) reported family responsibilities in 2018, according to Eurostat¹³. As expected, more women (37%) than men (32%) declared having such responsibilities. This gap even increases when considering those who adapt their jobs to their family responsibilities, with 39% of women and only 17% of men among the population surveyed. The low use of childcare services due to the lack of affordable solutions is one of the main reasons for this discrepancy. In fact, only 28% of those with parental responsibilities reported using such services.

In addition to childcare, carers, i.e. those who provide help to their ageing, sick or dependent parents at home, are also more likely to be women¹³. Depending on the Member States and the family model, they are already in contract and are often mothers. The accumulation of these roles and the achievement of the tasks that they require can lead to exhaustion and to slowing down or stopping work. The outsourcing of several care and support tasks to skilled and declared workers is a major issue in ensuring gender equality in Europe.

Furthermore, the home employment sector, where declared, represents a real opportunity for the integration and inclusion of people with a migrant background. It gives access to the labour market to people with low qualifications or whose diplomas are not recognised. It is a real lever for social inclusion through work, since it can enable workers to benefit from income and social rights.

III) The lack of declared and qualified domestic workers

While it is estimated that there are around 18 million domestic workers in the EU, less than half of them are registered¹⁴. This is mainly due to the low level of supervision of the sector at regional, national and European level, but also to the location, private households, and the nature of the activities carried out by the workers. Thus in 2013, the share of undeclared workers amounted to more than 45% in Germany, 40% in Italy and the Netherlands. The lack of more recent statistics illustrates the low recognition of these workers, who do not benefit from the same rights and social protection as those in standard sectors.

Despite the European initiatives such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), ECVET, Europass or ESCO, VET and qualification systems remain heterogenous within the EU. The creation of common standards is therefore a necessary step to foster the professionalisation of domestic workers. Through the European projects and the EPALE

¹² Eurostat (2020), *Part-Time employment as percentage of the total employment, by sex, age and country of birth (%)*. Retrieved July 9, 2020 from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-datasets/-/LFSA_EPPGACOB

¹³ Eurostat (2019), *Communiqué de presse : conciliation de la vie professionnelle et de la vie familiale*. Voir sur : <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/10157127/3-10102019-AP-FR.pdf/f2ee298c-dcd9-dc41-740d-2ca0d834e4bc>

¹⁴ EFFE (2019, March), *European White Paper: Home & Family Employment and Home Care in the EU*. Retrieved July 9, 2020 from <https://www.effe-homecare.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/White-Paper-EFFE.pdf>.

platform, EFFE has already made a major contribution to structuring a European network around common issues. All these actors are convinced that the recognition of workers' skills is an indispensable lever to guide them towards a sustainable and declared employment model.

Furthermore, this network has already identified the development axes necessary for the sector to contribute actively to the twin transition initiated by the European Commission. Digital skills would indeed enable workers to enhance their employability on the labour market and improve the quality of the services offered. Above all, it would promote the development of a declared model, particularly through declarative tools, such as online platforms. These tools are necessary to improve the working conditions of workers and provide fiscal incentives to their employers.

IV) Conclusion

All these elements illustrate the need to develop tools that foster the improvement and the validation of the skills acquired by domestic workers. Considering its limited level of action in the field of vocational education and training (VET), the EU can support social partners and Member States through Blueprint alliances.

EFFE strongly supports such an initiative, which could bring millions of workers out of the shadow, towards a declared and sustainable model. It would also enhance the quality of the services provided and promote the social inclusion of domestic workers. This would enhance their living conditions and increase their contributions and therefore finance their access to social rights and VET.