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The European Social
Dialogue Committee
FOR THE POSTAL SECTOR
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EUROPEAN SOCIAL DIALOGUE COMMITTEE FOR THE POSTAL SECTOR

WORKING GROUP ON TRAINING, HEALTH & SAFETY

Joint Declaration on Training and Work Environment in the Digital Transition

Context

For some time now the postal sector has been going through a process of wide and profound transformation but also of adaptation to the ever-growing needs of the market. This context also includes the challenges posed by the fast development of new technologies and digitisation that impact work organization, working conditions and employability.

An adaptation process to the market which, in recent years, had to take into account the huge economic and financial difficulties caused by sudden health emergency situation. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced postal companies to suddenly adapt to an unknown and dangerous situation, to undertake extraordinary prevention and work reorganization measures. It is very important to state, moreover, that during the most challenging months of the pandemic the postal sector has never stopped its activities, and has continued to ensure its core services guaranteeing its daily contribution to all citizens proving its role as an essential network throughout Europe. In this regard, the European Social Partners of the postal sector want to remember all workers who lost their lives during the most critical period of the health emergency.

The pandemic, in a context of diversification and digitalization impact on the sector, has made the role of the social dialogue even more important and concrete in making quick decisions, reorganizing work safely and adapting commercial strategies

to the new situation. At the same time, in an emergency situation, even training, retraining and up-skilling, provided in new formats compared to the past, have demonstrated the growing key role that digitization plays in training processes.

Aware of the role that digitization plays on training and re-skilling of workers, the social partners of the European Social Dialogue Committee for the postal sector (SDC – hereinafter), composed by the National Postal Operators, gathered under the umbrella of PostEurop, and the European Trade Unions organizations, as members of UNI Europa Post&Logistics and of CESI (European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions) have jointly implemented various actions and projects to analyse the issue of training, retraining and up-skilling of the sector and its future development.

To this end, the SDC “Training, Health & Safety” working group has achieved the following joint milestones over the years:

- 2006, Joint Declaration on Training and Skills, with the identification of 6 orientations for actions;
- 2014, Joint Declaration, at the conclusion of the project “Matching Skills & Jobs in the European Postal Sector” (2011-2013), which underlines the importance of training and retraining in accompanying the process of change in the sector and the correct matching between new and traditional jobs, in particular following the development of e-commerce;
- 2016-2018, implementation of the project “Promoting Social Dialogue in an enlarged Europe”, aimed at investigating the level of knowledge of the European social dialogue amongst members of the SDC and the initial impact of digitization on training and retraining in a context of social dialogue.
- 2019, Joint Declaration on Training in the Digital Era which, bringing together the main conclusions of the “Promoting Social Dialogue” project, focuses on the role and impact of new technologies, in particular digital ones, on training and retraining programs, on the requested skills as well as on the benefits and potential risks that digitization produces on the work environment.

Based on this important joint declaration and to verify the implementation of its contents, the Social Partners of the postal SDC have conceived and implemented a project, co-financed by the European Commission, called “Postal Skills and Work Environment in the Digital Era”. The initiative has placed the impact of digitization on skills and work environment at the center of the research in relation to three important professional areas which are core for most European postal companies: Back-Office operations, Delivery Operations, and Post-Offices network. A prospective analysis outlining the impact of digitization on training and re-training

over the next 5 years, the positive aspects and potentially negative consequences on the working environment and the role of social dialogue in managing this impact. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the postal SDC also included in the project a focus on the impact of e-learning on the provision of training and on changes in training programs due to the lock-down. In this way, the SDC postal initiative and its results were characterized by their relevance, constituting a valid analysis tool for the European social partners of the postal sector.

Considering the financial, economic and social context created by the pandemic and the consequences affecting the sector, the “Postal Skills and Work Environment in the Digital Era” project perfectly fits into the important initiatives taken by EU to support Member States on training, retraining, skills’ anticipation and new technologies are seen as the main tools to achieve such objectives. In particular, the SDC postal project must be included in the framework of the “Next Generation EU” initiative, the EU Social Pillar of Rights and its priorities related to the European Skills Agenda and the Pact for Skills as well as the Agreement on Digitisation signed by the European Social Partners in 2020.

Main Shared Findings

The European Social Partners of the postal sector jointly acknowledge that digitization continues to impact, at different levels, all the sector’s working areas and that this trend will continue in the coming years, determining opportunities to be seized but also identifying critical issues to be monitored to avoid potential risks and improve conditions in the workplaces.

The postal European Social partners jointly agree on the importance of the continued processes of modernization and diversification of products and services for the sector in particular due to e-substitution and the e-commerce development. The social partners also agree that digitization will intensify this process. Adaptation to such phenomena and the search for solutions to customers’ needs provide for answers to be sought on a case-by-case basis having consideration of the different national contexts.

Given the aforementioned phenomena, the SDC for the postal sector reaffirms the central and strategic role of training and re-training in managing digitization and diversification processes as well as for the acquisition of new or updated skills and competences considering new and transformed jobs. Given the general context, training, re-training and up-skilling must continue to be considered in a lifelong

perspective for the sector' employees to ensure digital transition, right intersection of skills and jobs and adequate levels of employability.

In this context of products and services diversification, the European social partners of the postal sector converge in considering the growing role of soft skills. Adequate training and re-training of employees on emerging soft skills will ensure the best connection between skilled employees, company and market needs.

The Social Partners of the European postal sector agree that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the performance of all work activities, accelerating the current trends in the sector, in particular the digital transition and the shift from the mail to the parcels' market.

The European social partners for the postal sector underline that it is important to have more training modelled on the subject-matter and the needs of the persons trained, involving even more employees in their training paths. Such paths will have to be included in a lifelong learning perspective in order to facilitate internal and external mobility, within the company, between companies and even between sectors.

The European social partners jointly agree on the impact of digitization on the sector over the next years and on the training provided. This trend requires a balance between e-learning modalities and face-to-face mode, particularly in the case of soft skills and work activities with a strong technological component. Training in both digital and soft skills will be essential to maintain and develop postal employees' employability.

The members of the postal sector SDC jointly confirm the growing role of social cohesion played by the postal sector which, thanks to digitization, is able to offer solutions even closer to the citizen needs. To this end, the European social partners for the postal sector agree that training is to be considered as a joint responsibility and that, in compliance with the different roles, it will be necessary to contribute to making training increasingly relevant, updated and in line with the sector's needs.

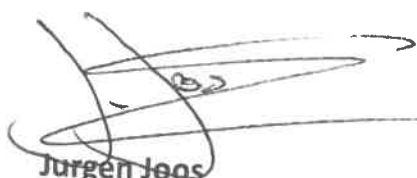
The European social partners of the postal sector jointly recognize the key role played by the social dialogue to accompany the sector's digitization and diversification processes to implement adequate training for the new market needs finding solutions capable to mitigate possible risks affecting the workplace. For this reason, the social partners at national level are encouraged to have a constant and constructive dialogue to reduce potential stress conditions linked to changes in tasks, roles and competences.

Next Steps

Consistent with the foregoing and in line with the conclusions of the “Postal Skills and Work Environment in the Digital Era” study, the European social partners of the postal sector jointly undertake to:

- Continue to focus their activities on the role of training, re-training and upskilling in a context of digital and ecological transition;
- Investigate the implementation of training both with reference to skills and behavior with a view to reducing risks and improving working conditions;
- Further investigate the impact of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, on training processes and working environment;
- Continue to promote the conclusions of the project “Postal Skills and Work Environment in the Digital Era” among the members of the SDC postal sector stimulating their participation in the activities of the “Training, Health & Safety” working group;
- Disseminate the conclusions of the projects implemented by the “Training, Health & Safety” working group also at national level in order to encourage dialogue between the social partners;
- Spread, also through the SDC postal sector website, the material collected and the conclusions of the study, encouraging consultation and debate among the members;
- Strengthen the exchange of information with relevant European Commission Directorates General and with the main stakeholders in order to better understand the changes taking place in the sector;
- Inspire the future activities of the working group, that could receive financial support by the European Commission, to the European policies on training in view of the priorities of the European Year of Skills (2023);

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