Call for Tenders

Skills and Work Environment in the Digital Postal Transition: New Analysis from the Social Partners

The postal services sector has been affected by the development of new technologies, the rise of e-commerce, changing customer requirements, and the imperatives of the green transition. This is why social partners in the postal sector are conducting a project titled "Skills and Work Environment in the Digital Postal Transition: New Analysis from the Social Partners". The project's goal is to provide social partners in the postal sector with a deeper understanding of the evolution of professional profiles and skills in postal services in view of these challenges. As a result, social partners will be better equipped to identify future skills requirements for four occupational profiles, namely back-office operations; delivery of postal items; post offices network; call centers or customer relations. The project will provide insight into essential skills for adapting to changes in postal employment and will collect best practices in terms of training.

To do that, the project will rely, amongst others, on artificial intelligence, as well as predictive and forecasting methods, to gain insight into the ongoing transformations and anticipate developments over the next decade. The postal sectoral social partners would like to contract an external partner with skills foresight expertise. The project steering group will review the applications received and select the most suitable proposal.

This project was proposed jointly by the employers' and workers' organizations in the postal sector, POSTEUROP, on the one hand, and UNI Europa and CESI, on the other, with the aim to implement parts of the work program of the Social Dialogue Committee for the Postal Sector (SDC). The project's duration is from May 2024 to May 2026.

1. Background

The European SDC for the postal sector was established in 1999, as the joint committee for postal employers and trade unions under the framework set out by the European Commission (http://www.postsocialdialog.eu). It aims to advise the Commission on European policies, which could have an impact on the postal and postal-related sectors. Questions related to training and retraining, including training programs and methods to support and accompany the transformation of the sector, have always been central to the SDC's work.

Since its creation, the SDC Training, Health & Safety working group has undertaken several initiatives in this area. Skills and training needs analyses have been a feature of the SDC work programs. One initiative that testified to that commitment was the Joint Declaration on Training and Skills Development in the Postal Sector (2006), clearly defining policies concerning training and the development of skills within the postal sector. The 2013 project 'Matching Skills & Jobs in the European Postal sector' enabled the social partners to better understand the postal sector's transformation and identify appropriate solutions in terms of training and retraining. The related Joint Declaration on Matching Skills and Jobs in the European Postal Sector (2014) stressed the importance of skills needs' anticipation and skills matching for both traditional and new jobs, training, up-skilling, and re-skilling programs.

Following the adoption of the Joint Statement on Postal Sector Evolution in 2007, the SDC launched the 'Social Observatory of the Postal Sector' initiative. Within the framework of this initiative, between 2008 and 2019 five projects co-financed by the European Commission, POSTEUROP and

UNI Europa were conducted. The projects addressed the management of change within the national postal operators (NPOs) in EU member states, focusing on the evolution of work organization and the role of training and re-training programs in anticipating and accompanying the sector's transformation. The projects also assessed the evolution of the postal sector environment in terms of social regulation and universal service.

Owing to the activity of its two working groups Training, Health & Safety and Postal Sector Evolution, the SDC identified accelerating internal transformation processes with an impact on employment and competences. Postal operators, depending on their economic, socio-political national, and internal context, have chosen different paths towards adaptation in social, organizational, training, and retraining terms.

The rapid adaptation process and the development of technologies drove a market evolution, which directly impacted postal operators' activities, working conditions, and work organization patterns in the sector. Given the development of e-commerce activities and changing customer requirements, postal operators were forced to innovate, develop, and strengthen new services as sources of revenue. The diversification of postal activities is the logical consequence for postal activities.

Social partners have worked together to ensure that new services are matched by good working conditions and are adapted to the use of new technologies. Postal operators have had to develop adequate training and re-training measures. Training programs and re-skilling of workers are key to national social dialogue processes.

The impact of digitalization on postal employment, on the required competences, as well as on work organization patterns and working conditions is a growing concern for postal social partners. The SDC project 'Mobilising Social Partners in a New Context' addressed the role of training and retraining within collective labor agreements to anticipate and accompany the sector's transformation. The European social partners wish to support the digital transformation of postal operators and to provide the necessary tools and skills to postal employees to accompany in a sustainable and democratic manner this digital transformation.

The project "Promoting Social Dialogue in the Postal Sector in an Enlarged Europe" implemented by the SDC Training, Health & Safety working group, raised awareness on the work of the SDC and the importance of social dialogue. Social partners learned how postal operators and trade unions manage the increased digitalization of their organizations in terms of its impact on products and services, on work organization patterns and working conditions, on competences, and on training needs and programs. Digitalization had in most cases led postal operators to offer new digital services to better meet customer needs. The project also identified a tendency of shifting personnel from mail to parcel operations, a reorganization process of network operations, with new parcels divisions creation and/or acquisition. The project also showed the role that new technologies (digital services, new technical devices, and automation) can play in new digital jobs and to ameliorate working conditions.

Digitalization and the introduction of new technologies such as robotics or operational automation through algorithms in the working environment has brought about new postal operational processes methods and new relations between postal employees and the machine. Digitalization in the postal sector has completely transformed both traditional and new postal occupational profiles. Social dialogue has also had to adapt to the new realities with specific collective agreements addressing the use of new technologies in a digital working environment.

Given the persistent need to investigate skill requirements within the sector, the current project serves as a continuation of the previous SDC project "Postal Skills and Work Environment in the Digital Era". It will enrich and improve the previous analysis of skills needs and chart the evolution of the

occupational profiles from the previous project, all while including a new profile – call centers or customer relations jobs. The study will look at skills evolution over the next 10 years instead of 3-5 years as in the previous project. The project will make use of a predictive algorithm to extrapolate future trends from available data. The social partners expect the analysis of large data sets by making use of machine learning. The use of predictive analysis is beneficial as it can easily identify recurring patterns in the data and easily compare and relate different sets of data. These patterns will serve as the basis for projections of occupational profiles' evolution.

The SDC is composed of representatives designated in the 28 member states by the recognized social partners at European level: POSTEUROP for the postal operators and UNI Europa Post & Logistics and CESI for the trade unions. It constitutes a solid network and serves as a platform where the social partners discuss issues such as the evolution of the postal sector, innovative training schemes, corporate social responsibility issues, and occupational health and safety. In view of the accelerating digital transition, the SDC has shifted its attention to new activities like e-commerce but also to the impact of new technologies on traditional activities. In such a fast-moving sector, it is essential to anticipate changes to competences requirements and work organization patterns.

2.   Context and Project Description

In view of the processes transforming postal services in Europe thus outlined, this project seeks to deepen the analysis of their impact on professional profiles and the evolution of skills in the medium term (ten years). As mentioned, the four occupational profiles are back-office operations; delivery of postal items; post offices network; call centers or customer relations. The insights from the study of these will feed into the assessment of current training offers and the development of new training pathways necessary to mitigate health and safety risks in view of the twin digital and green transitions. That way the social partners can guarantee quality employment and working conditions in the sector, which are proven to translate into increased efficiency and stability of operations. A key output will be a repository of training programs for postal operators, postal workers, and trade unions. Such a repository would facilitate the cross-sectoral and Europe-wide transferability of workers skills and competences along with skills certification processes.

To have a better grasp of future skills needs, the project will make use of traditional research methods, combined with innovative methodologies, such as predictive models based on artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. The social partners will enlist an external consultant to devise the methodology for data collection and prediction and analyze the gathered information. Additionally, the consultant will be tasked with drafting the final report and the facilitation of the four seminars and final conference. The seminars will take place in France, Italy, Latvia, and Greece.

Each of the four seminars will gather up to 40 representatives from postal operators and postal trade unions. They will discuss the evolution of skills over the next decade, expected occupational health and safety risks, and the extent to which competences and training paths can contribute to mitigating them, and will collect good practices.

Each seminar will comprise two sections. The first one will feature the presentation of collected quantitative data and allow space for the generation of data through digital games, exercises to detail relevant skills, their future development, and training priorities. Additionally, this section will also address the occupational health and safety risks identified for each occupational profile and derive recommendations on how training pathways can reduce or mitigate the identified occupational health and safety risks.

The second section will validate the data generated in the first section and translate it into qualitative inputs. Selected experts on the subject matter will be invited to roundtable discussions. That way, the seminars should enable the formulation of recommendations on training pathways and assembling a training pathways catalogue. The catalogue will feature training programs that address skills with added value for the foreseen evolution of the postal sector. The catalogue's format should allow comparison across national contexts. The training catalogue will be made available online and be accessible to postal operators and postal workers.

By applying machine learning algorithms, AI can build predictive models to forecast future skill requirements based on historical data and current trends. These models can consider factors such as economic indicators, technological advancements, and demographic changes. They can extract valuable insights from unstructured text data, such as job descriptions and social media posts, to identify emerging skills and job roles. The use of AI can enhance the accuracy of forecasting skills needs in the economy and inform stakeholders' decisions about workforce development. Moreover, AI-powered learning platforms can contribute to the design of personalized training and development opportunities tailored to postal workers' roles and career goals.

Through the project the social partners also seek to assess the health and safety risks emanating from algorithmic management and how it possibly affects the working conditions in the relevant occupational profiles. This analysis will aid the formulation of new training pathways and recommendations for governing occupational health and safety risks. Additionally, the project would propose training programs, which allow the inclusion of employees with disabilities in digitalized working environments. AI can analyze large datasets related to workplace incidents, employee health records, and operational data to identify patterns and correlations between algorithmic management practices and OHS risks. Similarly, AI-powered predictive models can forecast the likelihood of OHS risks associated with specific algorithmic management interventions. This analysis can help in understanding the potential impact of algorithms on worker safety.

Moreover, AI can analyze regulatory requirements and industry standards related to OHS to ensure that algorithmic management practices adhere to legal and ethical guidelines. By flagging potential compliance gaps or violations, AI can open opportunities for organizations to proactively address OHS risks associated with algorithmic decision-making.

Together with the consultants, the social partners will gather additional information on skills, particularly soft skills, training and re-training programs from both postal operators and trade unions. The external consultant will be responsible for developing a research methodology that fulfills the predictive criteria of the analysis, as well as for implementing the project deliverables. They will assess the evolution of the relevant skills over the next decade, analyze the role of training in managing occupational health and safety risks, and identify successful training pathways for each occupational profile. The training catalogue they compile would enable social partners to shape and devise their training programs, particularly in view of digital skills. It will allow the anticipation of the postal workforce skills needs. Training measures and offerings need to adapt and offer concrete and usable outputs regarding the use of new technologies and the adaptation of service provision.

The project steering group, consisting of social partner representatives, will coordinate the project and work closely with the selected external consultants, throughout the project phases, notably through regular phone and Teams meetings.

The project is divided in three phases:

Phase 1 Preparatory phase

The selected external consultant will propose a concept for the international seminars that will be adopted by the project steering group. The common methodology will enable the external consultants to start the analysis of previous materials, databases, and existing literature. The collected materials will serve the staging of each occupational profile seminar to address the three identified themes at each seminar.

Phase 2 Staging of four seminars

Data and materials for each occupational profile will be further collected and developed during each international seminar in an interactive format. Qualitative data will be inputted for each occupational profile during the staging of the seminars. The staging of the seminars will be arranged to enable the interactive collection and exchange of inputs for each occupational profile. Each seminar will address the three mentioned themes for each occupational profile. Each roundtable will serve the in-depth analysis of the skills that are currently used as well as the skillset (digital soft skills), its evolution and an analysis of the skills needs over the next 10 years for that occupational profile. The roundtables will follow an interactive methodology that enables the gathering of qualitative data for each occupational profile. The skill set's evolution in that time horizon will be of key importance if coupled with the analysis of the role that training and retraining can play in reducing potential occupational health and safety risks, in particular stress and isolation in the digital work environments. The current good practices in training pathways will be presented by national stakeholders and contribute also to the building of the training catalogue.

Phase 3 Final conference and results dissemination

Staging of the Final Conference

Together with the consultants, the project steering group will plan and coordinate the staging of the final conference, which will bring together European postal stakeholders, the sectoral social partners, and facilitate the dissemination of the project results. It will enable their dissemination towards the European institutions and allow further exchanges on identified good practices and the devised joint recommendations. The conference will feature a presentation of the Training Pathways repository.

Final Reporting, dissemination, and communication of project results

The project steering group will ensure the dissemination of the project results and assemble and finalize the final report. The design and launch of the training catalogue will be presented during the final conference. The project is to set up a training pathways catalogue available online in six languages. The four occupational profiles reports, as well as the training catalogue, will inform the final report and the final conference. The project steering group and the consultants will stage the seminars and the final conference to ensure the social and policy impact of the projects results through targeting European postal social partners and engaging other postal stakeholders such as European policymakers in the postal industry. The final report will document the four occupational profile reports addressing the project's themes and an additional 20 pages proposing a transversal analysis, short discussion of the training repository, concluding remarks, as well as jointly agreed policy recommendations.

3.   Purpose of the Contract

The external consultants will collect and analyze relevant data for the purposes of predicting relevant skills in the four occupational profiles as described above, write a full report, and compile a training catalogue. The external expert(s) will participate and present findings at relevant meetings and events linked to the project. They will be facilitating the four seminars and Final Conference. This work will be undertaken under the supervision of and in cooperation with the sectoral social partners composing the project steering group.

4.   Tasks to Be Performed by the External Consultant

<u>Phase 1</u> Preparatory Phase

May 2024 - August 2024

Tasks

- Take part in kick-off meeting.
- Design methods for the collection and analysis of information on skills needs; training programs; the impact (positive and negative) of digitalization, new business models, and the green transition on the work environments and working conditions for the selected occupational profiles.
- Design methods to forecast skills needs.
- Design the structure and activities at the four seminars.

Results

- A presentation of the methodology for data collection, analysis and forecasting of skills needs, the training programs, as well as the impact of digitalization, new business models, and the green transition on the work environments and working conditions for the selected occupational profiles.
- A written summary of both the methodology and the design of the seminar activities.

<u>Phase 2</u> Staging of Four Seminars

September 2024 – January 2026

Tasks

- Review data collected within previous project.
- Collect new data related to skills anticipation in the postal sector.
- Analyze data and forecast skill developments.
- Analyze data on the effect of algorithmic management in the postal sector on occupational health and safety.
- Design and facilitate four one-day seminars.
- Draft occupational profile reports addressing in depth the three themes of the project after the staging of each seminar. The four reports will cover the project's objectives and themes for each occupational profile.

Results

- Four seminars organized and facilitated.
- Four occupational profile reports covering the project's objectives and themes to include the data analysis and a description of the anticipated skills needs.

- Four occupational profile reports are adopted after the staging of the related seminar.

Phase 3 Final Conference and Results Dissemination

January-April 2026

Tasks

- Together with the project steering group, the external consultant will design and facilitate the final conference to ensure a successful final project event.
- Design the final conference activities.

Results

- One-day final conference with up to 80 participants.
- Draft of Final Report containing the four occupational profile reports addressing the project's themes and an additional 20 pages proposing a transversal analysis, short discussion of the training repository, concluding remarks as well as jointly agreed policy recommendations.

5. Eligibility/Required Expertise

The external consultant team ought to exhibit expertise in the following fields:

- **In-depth knowledge of and experience with the postal services sector**. The consultant should have an in-depth knowledge of the postal sector, including the dynamics of social dialogue and the specific challenges it faces.
- **Understanding of EU regulations and knowledge of EU social and economic policies**: It is essential that the company has a solid understanding of European processes and policies related to labor and social dialogue. An understanding of the current discussions on digital skills and competences at EU level is required.
- **Research and analysis**: The external agency must be able to conduct comprehensive research on future skills in the postal sector, analyzing labor market trends, technological innovations, AI application, and social partners' needs.
- **Design and planning**: It should possess design and planning skills to develop a detailed plan for research on future skills in the postal sector, including clear objectives, research methodologies, and planning of activities.
- **Innovation orientation**: It must have an innovation-oriented approach to identify and develop creative and sustainable solutions to address future challenges in the postal sector.
- **Knowledge of and experience with training programs aimed at the re-skilling or up-skilling of personnel**, notably in terms of adapting to the digitalization of the economy and society.
- **Knowledge of occupational health and safety (OHS) and of the processes of digitalization and their impact on OHS and working conditions**.

In addition to the previously mentioned skills, the company should also possess the following competencies to develop training projects with a digital and accessibility perspective in mind:

- **Digital literacy and technological proficiency**: The ability to understand and make use of digital tools and technologies to develop training programs utilizing digital platforms, virtual learning environments, and online resources effectively.

- **Accessibility expertise**: Knowledge and understanding of accessibility standards and guidelines (such as WCAG - Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) to ensure that training materials and platforms are accessible to individuals with disabilities. Ability to collaborate with accessibility specialists and disability advocacy groups to ensure that training programs meet the needs of all learners, including those with disabilities; Understanding of legal requirements related to digital accessibility, including relevant regulations such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or the European Accessibility Act, to ensure compliance in training development and delivery.
- **Cultural sensitivity, diversity awareness, and familiarity with inclusive design principles**: Sensitivity to cultural differences and diversity issues to design training programs that are inclusive and respectful of learners from diverse backgrounds and identities; Familiarity with principles of inclusive design to create training programs that consider diverse learner needs, including those related to age, language, culture, and cognitive or physical abilities.
- **Knowledge of assistive technologies**: Familiarity with assistive technologies and tools used by individuals with disabilities, such as screen readers, alternative input devices, and captioning systems, to optimize training accessibility.
- **User experience (UX) design**: Skills in UX design to create intuitive and user-friendly training interfaces and materials that enhance learner engagement and effectiveness.
- **Instructional design proficiency**: Expertise in instructional design methodologies to develop structured and engaging training content, incorporating multimedia elements, interactive activities, and assessments.
- **Continuous improvement mindset**: A commitment to ongoing evaluation and improvement of training programs based on feedback, data analysis, and emerging trends in digital learning and accessibility.
- **Proficiency in data mining and predictive analytics**.
- **Knowledge of and experience with work organization patterns**, restructuring, industrial adaptation, and anticipation.
- **Knowledge of and experience with artificial intelligence and digital trends in occupational profile adaptation**, considering emerging technologies.
- **Knowledge of and experience with digital human resources transformation**.
- **Knowledge and experience on Edu Tech, learning Analytics, skill assessment design, training provision through gamification (smart games).**
- **Business strategy with data analytics**.
- **Knowledge of industrial relations and the shaping of training programs in a social dialogue context** (preferential).
- **English and at least one other European language**.

The external consultant should exhibit expertise in the above broad subjects with proven experience of supporting diverse groups in conducting qualitative data analysis. The external contractor should have a good understanding of social issues and sufficient knowledge about European structures. Ideally it should have relevant knowledge of issues related to human resources and industrial relations.

6. Selection Criteria

The following criteria will be considered to select among external contractors:

- The presentation of the bid must be clear, well-structured and relevant to the requirements.
- The bid should consider the sectoral specificities, the evolution of postal activities, jobs, and the broader environment, notably when formulating their methodology.

- The clarity, innovativeness, and efficacy of the proposed methodology.
- A team of international consultants would be an important asset.
- Proposing additional ideas.
- The price is non-negotiable.
- The bid should be sent both in electronic and paper version.
- All interested applicants must send in their application by **7 June 2024** at the latest, to UNI Europa Post & Logistics Director Dimitris Theodorakis at: dimitris.theodorakis@uniglobalunion.org

7. Payments and standard contract

Payment to the contractor will be made in two invoices. A first invoice will be issued when the contract is signed (whose amount should not exceed 30% of the overall budget). A second invoice of the remaining fees will be paid at completion of the project.

8. Price

The external consultant will be paid in accordance with the contract signed with the European Commission. Therefore, terms of price are non-negotiable and do not represent criteria of award. The selected external expert will be paid according to a maximum amount of €130,000 (hundred and thirty thousand euros), **VAT <u>included</u>**. Travel and accommodation costs will be covered by the project's budget and should not be included in the submitted offer.