

# IT- IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU AGENDA FOR ADULT LEARNING 2017-2019



## SURVEY ON BASIC SKILLS PROVISION IN ENTREPRISE

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Grant Agreement n. 2017-2294/001-001 - Project n. 592059-EPP-1-2017-1-IT-EPPKA3-AL-AGENDA

*Il presente progetto è realizzato con il supporto del Programma Erasmus+ dell'Unione Europea*

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## Contents

1. Survey rationale.....	2
2. Aim, objectives and hypotheses.....	3
3. Conclusions and recommendations .....	6

### 1. Survey rationale

In a context that still appears to be characterised by delays and permanent fragility and difficulties in affirming the necessary awareness by companies and workers themselves about the crucial importance of investing in skills - with particular regard to basic skills - made even more complex by reductions in available resources and adjustment needs arising from the redefinition of rules and regulations that impact interprofessional funds, there are also exciting elements that open up interesting prospects for improvement. (ANPAL, 2018) With data on participation in Continuing Training showing that Italy is still below the EU average, some indicators show a steady improvement. Compared to the level of use of the *upskilling* and *reskilling* offer available to 24-65 year olds, which in the EU stands at more than 10%, the Italian figure appears distant (around 8% - LFS), although slowly but steadily rising compared to the previous decade. The number of training companies is increasing, reaching 60%, and the percentage of workers involved (in total, almost 46%: it should be noted that the latter figure is higher than the EU average). It increases the number of companies that decide to join the Inter-Professional Funds and well over 10 million workers benefit from upgrade and upskilling initiatives supported by these devices.

The survey on the provision of basic skills in the enterprise was expected among the actions and products of the project on the implementation of the European Agenda for Learning in Adulthood 2017-2019, It highlighted - during preparation - the need to address the need to increase the supply of adult learning in basic skills or key skills for adult workers, in particular for those aged 50-55, as well as to raise awareness in the business world about the importance of investing in the functional literacy of their employees..

In the two years of implementation of the project, the necessary strengthening of relations with the social partners that manage the most important Interprofessional Funds has been at the heart of the commitment of the research staff, as well as all the opportunities to get in touch with the relevant stakeholders with respect to the topic. Numerous interviews, individual and group, have allowed to integrate an intense activity of desk *analysis* and *literature review*, however facilitated by a contemporary and intense production of research and investigations with similar objectives produced by national and international research centers and the availability of up-to-date data on the main phenomena of interest (OECD, 2019) (CEDEFOP, 2019) (IRS IES, 2019) (Angotti & Alii, 2019) (INAPP,FONDIMPRESA, 2019) (World Economic Forum, 2018) (OECD, 2019) .

The focus has mainly been on changes in recent years on issues such as the certification of the skills of workers involved in the upgrade and continuing training courses, or the possibility of including modules relating to basic skills in upskilling programmes. Both issues were also framed from the analysis of the changed legislative *framework* on the processes of validation and certification of skills, the definition of the

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new guidelines for the use of resources arising from their provision in inter-professional funds, the signing of agreements and protocols of understanding by the main players of the Social Dialogue and the analysis of the important innovations introduced in one of the most important CCNL (the metalworking sector)

The *first chapter* explains the set of survey objectives. starting from a framework of the same in the Implementation Project in Italy of the EU Agenda for Learning in Adulthood: an initiative that, in turn, is in direct connection with the objectives of the Recommendation on Improvements of Training Pathways for Adult Skills and which, in fact, has developed in an integrated and inter-functional way with the EaSI Progress Project - E.QU.A.L. with which it shared a significant part of the objectives.

The *second Chapter* succinctly reconstructs the context in which the dynamics of the survey are observed: from the presentation of the *magnitude* of the problem of literacy-functional skills affecting a large part of the population and, in particular, of workers, to brief considerations about the possible consequences of the massive introduction into production and service delivery processes of digitisation and automation on the skills and knowledge needs of workers.

The *third chapter* describes – again in synthetic form – the offer of *upskilling* and *reskilling* available. From this descriptive premise, two emerging themes are highlighted and addressed: that of the recognition and validation of skills as a result of upskilling and reskilling paths undertaken by workers (including recalling the main points of agreements and protocols signed during industrial relations) and training as a subjective right of workers, a principle formally introduced for the first time in the CCNL of the metalworking sector. In the latter case, the study also presents examples of *upskilling* paths in which agreement has been reached between the social partners and which represent, to some extent, a possible concrete variation of the new contractual rules.

*The text of the report closes* with a series of key messages, recommendations and indications of questions on which both education and training systems and actors in social dialogue should seek urgent and concrete answers.

## 2. Aim, objectives and hypotheses

This chapter summarizes the purpose and operational objectives of the Survey on the training offer currently provided in the company, with particular reference to content relating to the acquisition of basic skills by workers.

First of all, it must be said that its re-proposal also within the Project on the implementation in Italy of the European Agenda for Lifelong Learning (2017-2019) had originated from a number of considerations:

1. In 2016 and early 2017, a similar action had been initiated, but not concluded due to difficulties in establishing effective discussions with the main protagonists of the processes of continuing training (entrepreneurs, workers and representatives of the social partners). It remains extremely important to contribute to increasing employer engagement to ensure greater opportunities to learn basic skills in the workplace, especially for workers aged 50-55. This evidence was clearly evident from interviews conducted during the 2016-2017 project with some representatives of the Inter-Professional Funds. It was therefore decided to continue to pursue the objective, that is to systematize the available knowledge and account for the evolution of the scenario, relaunching the activity, strengthening the commitment in the preparatory phase of the actual investigation;

2. to respond to the need to support, as prescribed in the Call<sup>1</sup>, the pursuit of the objectives contained in the Recommendation on Improvements of Training Pathways for Adult Skills, paying particular attention to the need for functional literacy and the adequacy of the training and *reskilling* offer in relation to the cognitive needs and styles of the groups most at risk;
1. identify and pursue all the paths of work that, in various ways, they intersected those of initiatives already underway on similar issues or promoted new ones, creating the appropriate synergies and economies of scale while keeping the administrative management carefully separate (as an example is the simultaneous simultaneous action of the national coordinator with that of the EaSI Progress Project - E.QU.A.L. with which it shared a significant part of the assumptions and objectives or the action to support the preparation new applications on devices such as EaSI-Progress – Calls 2018 and 2019);
2. it was necessary to continue in technical - scientific support to the Administrations and networks with which in the course of previous initiatives had been initiated paths of collaboration aimed at offering on the topic of *policy advice*. In the period important programmers and finalization of processes defining important and relevant devices (for example, the QNQ and the design of the identification systems, Validation and Certification of Skills) would come to a conclusion.

Achieving the purpose of raising companies' awareness of the importance of investing in the literacy skills of their employees also requires - of course - much more than the implementation of a survey. *"The events of continuing training are illustrated and discussed in depth much less than would be necessary. Yet their centrality in keeping the economic system competitively and effectively protecting working people should be a generally shared starting point:* if there are signs of increasing awareness of the importance of<sup>2</sup> attaching a new and marked centrality to the issue of investment in human capital within companies, it is becoming increasingly evident even in the social party documents (agreements, agreements, CCNL), one cannot fail to agree with Solomon's call for more.

The change required is essentially cultural and affects the field of values that must guide a *vision* of a social and economic model, within which innovation is promoted and accepted and its potential disruptive or *disruptive* effects resulting, are contrasted with the responsible contribution of all the forces at stake.

The difficulty, or resistance, in fundamentally changing the attitudes and behaviours of companies in relation to the explicit demand or – more often – implicit *upskilling* and *reskilling* placed by workers, were considered in much of the literature the real *bottlenecks*, the braking factors.

But, in reconstructing the origins of the problem, it does not seem correct to deny that there is also a subject of lack of awareness of the usefulness of investing in their own skills also by citizens and, in this case, workers. The levels of participation in educational opportunities by adults, however noted (LFS, AES, CVTS), are low although very slow to grow: but the recorded concentration of the answers given about the motivation of non-participation on the opinion of the little or no usefulness of doing so, expressed in large part by those who would need it most (adults *low skilled and low qualified*).

The high levels of functional illiteracy, also recorded as a result of the PIAAC Survey, have "only" consequences on the quality of life, work or health of individuals, but reproduce and reinforce prejudices about the importance of education and training. Poor levels of mastery of *basic skills*, in other words, produce in the individual low self-esteem, reduce its self-eminence, induce to consider extremely limited their locus of *control*, exclude from participation inactive life, impact on the size and quality of their social capital. In

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<sup>1</sup>Call 2017 suggested that we consider increasing the adult learning offering in basic skills or key skills for a specified subgroup. In Italy, this issue seems to be particularly important and relevant for adult workers, particularly for 50-55 year olds, who are very often involved in short upgrade and/or upskilling (continuing training) courses, which, however, do not focus on basic skills.

<sup>2</sup>Although not fully and "fairly" distributed among the different actors involved.

other words, being in an educational poverty situation for an adult, worker or not, entails not only marginality and exclusion but also and above all the difficulty of correctly interpreting and defining one's needs and making informed decisions.

In other words, it seems extremely difficult to stimulate and promote intentionality to follow *upskilling* and *reskilling* paths, where the lack of basic skills prevents *de facto* recognition of its functionality in relation to its needs.

Increasing awareness within companies of the importance of continuing training and the need to increase the skills – even basic – of human capital in it, is a challenge that cannot be overcome unless we recognize the need to act, with specific arguments, languages and levers, on all the components present in it.

The contribution that an investigation, such as the one presented in this summary report, can offer, lies not only in its cognitive purpose and in the sharing of the results of heuristic action and analysis. Rather, its value of use lies in the process of interlocution activated with the different actors at stake and in the countless occasions of meeting and exchange, during which, by asking questions or stimuli of discussion, themes have been brought out, assumptions of different perspectives, stimulated processes of reflexivity, aroused new curiosities and formulated hypotheses on new paths of work.

The achievement of this meta-target was, implicitly, also identified in the first formulation of the hypothesis and research questions:

1. there is a substantial low visibility of the offer of *upskilling* and *reskilling* paths aimed at acquiring basic and cross-cutting skills, but this does not mean that the issue is not taken over and that there are no important experiences already conducted or being implemented;
2. There is an increase in the social partners' focus on the value and the need to increase investment in this type of competence and this is no longer 'confined to the elaborations of the Study Centres', but increasingly precipitates into agreements, agreements, agreements, bilateral protocols that represent a real break in the paradigms of industrial relations. The need to disseminate and promote these approaches remains: an investigation activity characterized by *action-research* methods and approaches can usefully contribute to the purpose;
3. The value of use and exchange of skills can be strengthened in the presence of validation and certification paths. The activation of these processes begins not only to be frequent, but also formalized as a constraint in guidelines and CCNL. Certification, but also the outcome of the learning verification processes contained in the different forms of certification, contribute substantially to increasing the belief in the beneficiaries to invest in something useful (for themselves and for the company in which they operate);
4. flexibility and modularity in the offer of *upskilling/reskilling* and design for skills - with references to shared standards and frameworks (DigiComp 2.1 or QNQ, for example) - begin to represent no longer good practice, but how to organize continuing training to be taken as a reference. The dissemination of the results of this survey may help to broaden the use of these approaches.



### 3. Conclusions and recommendations

In the course of carrying out the survey, it was possible to update, as expected, the cognitive framework on the provision of *upskilling* and *reskilling* opportunities for adult workers. This is a framework that can usefully be complemented, especially by the results of the surveys and analyses that will be available in a few months' time in the 19th National Report on Continuing Training being prepared by Anpal.

From the many talks with representatives of the social partners and experts in this area, including those from private study and research centres, the trends and dynamics identified should not change direction and meaning and, in this perspective, it is conceivable that the picture should not be subject to substantial changes.

In fact, it is expected that

1. a confirmation of the growth *trend* in memberships to Inter-Professional Funds, resulting in an increase in the number of beneficiaries involved;
2. greater use of such devices for an increasingly targeted training offer and potentially less characterized by essentially "fulfilling" pathways;
3. increased interest by companies in the opportunities – in terms of efficiency of production processes and, consequently, increasing their competitiveness – offered by the promotion of upskilling and updating of human capital;
4. the progressive acquisition of awareness by workers about the benefits of participating in upskilling activities;
5. an expansion of the training offer, modular and flexible, carried out with methodologies that also use technologies and teaching methods based more on experiential learning.
6. a greater attention of entrepreneurs and workers to the issues of the enhancement of the skills acquired by the beneficiaries of *the upskilling* and *reskilling* paths (until they reach real certifications of the acquisition of them).

Much remains to be done, however, to generate the necessary impacts with respect to the quality of human operational capital in companies, in terms of combating functional illiteracy of adults - and workers in particular - on increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of *governance* in charge of address and evaluation of policies and devices being implemented, on the solutions to be designed and adopted in the field of active *ageing* in the enterprise.

It has been pointed out that the least skilled workers receive less training. While this situation unites Italy with other countries, including more advanced ones, the fact that workers in highly skilled occupations are on average more involved in (Lovergine, 2018) *upskilling* and *reskilling* practices than those engaged in low-skilled jobs and tasks, which for, the latter, are increasing the risk of finding themselves in a low skills *trap*.. The investment priority is, therefore, to be assigned to the creation of all those conditions (organizational, economic, logistical, but above all cultural and political) that guarantee accessibility and participation in *life-long and life-wide learning* opportunities of all workers, especially those most vulnerable and at an older age (over 55), regardless of qualification or contractual level of membership. With this in mind, it is urgent to consider the full assumption, by all stakeholders, of the objective of increasing the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises, within which the creation of the above conditions could find, physiologically, more difficult to implement.

Directly connected to the previous reflection is the theme of the endemic difficulty to act in a framework of coordination and sharing between the different actors (institutional and economic) to plan, implement and

evaluate the necessary *policies* and interventions capable of considering and pursuing simultaneous impacts on demand and supply of human capital.

The persistence of *mismatch skills*, associated with a self-referentiality of the training provision, produces heavy effects of dispersion of scarce resources and reproduction of inequalities. Strengthening social dialogue by increasing awareness and accountability in each of the parties that animate it on the medium and long-term consequences of a lack of attention to the issue of the qualification of human capital, it cannot remain a purpose "in the background" or merely a component of a "platform": on the contrary, it must assume the rank of operational objective, the achievement of which must be pursued through the direct involvement of all in all phases of activation of a training process, from the identification of the requirements to the acquisition - possibly certified - of the levels of competence to which it refers.

From this perspective, the issues of availability and regularity of flows of resources to support continuing training are equally relevant to the need to find shared and transparent solutions also with regard to the need, highlighted by all those involved in the survey, to simplify administrative procedures.

More effective and shared *governance* would also allow the issue of training qualification to be addressed with a greater focus on contents, management and training providers. The ability to design and implement training paths on the basis of "knowledge that is needed" and with measurable learning outcomes, must become the discriminating factor for the permanence in the market of those who are able to functionally accompany both objectives of increasing the competitiveness of production systems, as well as the purpose of increasing the skills of workers, to ensure their horizontal and vertical mobility opportunities or facilitate any, voluntary, transitions.

With this in mind, the skills-strengthening paths of workers require a substantial rethink, especially in cases where they continue to be very focused on areas of compliance. In addition, the complexity of the content requires a good level of mastery in the basic skills, which is very often regarded as certainly existing without any process of preventive *assessment*. These are competences that must be recognized and whose acquisition must be facilitated and promoted, "*particularly important for operating effectively in contexts where information is circulating and decisions are made in a poorly formalized manner*". (Vitali, Amendola, & Mereu, I gruppi a rischio e le strategie per contrastare l'analfabetismo funzionale : targeting, 2019)

It is therefore necessary to make available also in the company an offer that *integrates skills audit*, recovery and strengthening of basic *skills* and paths, as much as possible individualized in the content and modes of delivery, consistent with standards of content and duration that allow the recognition and validation – even partial – of the skills acquired in the outcome.

If the ability to take advantage and take full advantage of the potential of new digital technologies implies mastering basic skills such as literacy, *problem solving* is also necessary to promote the training and updating paths on digital skills in a decisive way, ensuring that they are fully responsive to standards and certifications (for example, based on the DigComp 2.1 framework for the digital skills of citizens with eight levels of mastery) that can be expendable and recognized in their fair value of use and exchange on the labour market<sup>3</sup>.

In this regard, the Law 205/2017 ("*State Budget for the 2018 financial year and multi-year budget for the three-year period 2018-2020*") which provided for the establishment of facilities to promote upskilling and reskilling activities of workers employed in the form of a tax credit. The facilitation mechanism covers the training costs of employees where the paths allow the acquisition or strengthening of the technological skills relevant to the "National Plan Enterprise 4.0".

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<sup>3</sup>for example, based on the DigComp 2.1 reference frame. citizens' digital skills, which provides for eight levels of mastery

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Finally, the ability to compensate for the destruction of jobs in jobs made obsolete by technological change is linked to the generation of new jobs – in new or existing sectors – and to the adaptation of the skills of the workforce. The effectiveness of compensation depends mainly on the size and speed with which new employment and new skills are generated, as well as on the ability to adapt existing skills. The timing of the adjustment of the economy can be influenced by the degree of development and the economic and technological conditions that can be recorded at a time when technological change occurs:

1. availability of enabling infrastructures;
2. quantity and quality of existing skills;
3. demographic structure of the population;
4. quality of institutions for training and scientific research;
5. public and private financial resources useful for new investment and training;
6. sectoral composition of the economy and relative weight of the high-tech sectors;
7. macro-economic conditions. (Dario Guarascio, 2017)

Precisely with regard to this last conclusion, it would be necessary to deepen the issue of the availability of enabling infrastructures (in particular, what should be, what is the perception of relative availability, how to increase it and what are the responsibilities and roles of the different actors involved), as well as that of the quantity and quality of existing skills (the skills assessment paths in the company: which workers to involve and for what predominant purposes)? What operational implications (permanent infrastructure, model "assessment center", dedicated information systems, time and place of the process)?