ETUC views on
"Artificial Intelligence in workers' skills development"

Discussed by ETUC's "Training, VET and Skills Committee" on 23 October 2024

Background

The AI development is a dynamic field and AI technologies will rather replace tasks than jobs. According to CEDEFOP, 4 out of 10 workers use AI technologies in their work and 67% of the workers believe that AI helped them to boost the completion of their tasks. 44% of the workers do not think that the employers will provide them trainings and involve them in decisions on AI's impact on workplaces and workers' rights, and they are concerned that AI will replace their jobs. 61% of the workers feel that they need more knowledge on AI on the impact of their work. At the same time, only 25% of the workforce had training on digital skills in the pandemic. They were younger, male, higher skilled workers (CEDEFOP).

ETUC views

Digital transition and introduction of AI in the workplace will have the most impact on the low-skilled workers, the female and older workers. Reducing labour shortages and skills shortages needs to be achieved by ensuring quality and attractive jobs for all workers. All workers need right to access employee trainings, to recognition of trainings and to validation of their skills and competences, and right to improve their qualification levels in order to ensure just transition.

AI is introduced to jobs and sectors differently. The necessary level of inclusion of AI to jobs and in updating and defining skills and qualifications should be discussed with trade unions. Trade unions should be involved in introducing AI to jobs and to specify skills strategies in order to mitigate its impact on workers. Respect of **social dialogue and collective agreements defining training rights** and information provision to workers play a key role in digitalization of industries. The responsibility of employers in supporting workers' access to training is essential. Trainings must be available to all workers regardless of their contractual situation, sectors, geographical area, and the size of companies.

It is important that **recruitment** processes are regulated at national levels, with the involvement of trade unions, in order to ensure **equal treatment of workers** in these processes. Using AI in automated recruitment raises concerns about defining and understanding **learning outcomes and qualifications**. Trade unions are concerned about the development of the ESCO tool as it automatizes matching job vacancies and job seekers' CVs. Many job seekers do not have access to free and high-quality career

guidance services which could support them with the application process and inform them about preparing their CV to be understood by automated recruitment tools.

Enforced implementation of the 1st principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights should ensure to all workers the **right to access to employee training on AI**. Right to training is key to meet the Porto targets on digital skills[1] as workers need basic digital skills, digital literacy, and general knowledge about AI, especially on its impact on their work, work organizations, working conditions, and health and safety. It is essential to help workers with improving their competency level on AI including on the ethical issues raised by AI, applications of AI, role of humans in developing AI, how computer or machine learns from data using algorithm, and on how to work alongside AI. Workers need to be trained to improve their **basic skills and key competences** such as critical thinking to be able to identify the limits and possibilities of using AI in work, eg via ChatGPT.

Governments need to set up adult learning strategies with the social partners which ensure provision of quality and certified trainings to adults and workers on AI. Fair use of **individual learning accounts** and similar voucher systems could better support trainings to workers on AI. At the same time, it is important that the **employers take their responsibility for workers' training** instead of using only ILA-supported training activities which request many workers to pay for additional training fee and for training materials, and to participate trainings outside of working hours.

Implementation of the quality standards of the Council Recommendation on **micro-credentials[2]** and involving the trade unions to quality assurance monitoring of external VET providers can ensure quality and certified trainings to adults on AI. It is important that the implementation of the *Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012)* is enforced by enhanced social dialogue and public investment to **validation systems**. Trainings of workers also on AI should be validated, certified, and added to qualifications in order to improve their positions on **wage setting and promotions**.

Concerning provision of **training to workers by Ai, there are indeed several AI-lead and supported tools** (eg. intelligent tutoring system, AI-enabled simulations, AI-support with learning needs; smart admission systems) which can individualize learning, support learning with learning problems[3], and can change and enhance training provisions to workers and trade union members. Nevertheless, trade unions are concerned that AI training platforms do not necessarily increase the motivation for learning and they can hardly be sufficient in supporting skill development of the low-skilled people due to lack of human interaction of teaching. Ethical concerns and data protection on using AI in vocational education and training and adult learning are important factors to inform the

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[1] At least 60% of Europeans participating annually in training and promoting access to basic digital skills for at least 80% of people aged 16-74.
[2] EUR-Lex - 52021DC0770 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)
[3] OECD: The potential impact of Artificial Intelligence on equity and inclusion in education, 2024

workers about. Ensuring data safety and ethical use of AI are essential, and AI should not assess humans' competences and skills. The role of trainers and mentors and their access to continuous professional development on AI is crucial as their jobs are affected by AI. A future Directive on AI should define clear objectives on trainings to workers organized by/on AI tools from the perspective of equal access, fair treatment, data protection, validation and certification.

European trade unions:
- Demand enhanced implementation of the EPSR on ensuring right to access to training on digital skills and AI;
- Encourage social dialogue and broadening collective agreements on trainings and information to workers on AI;
- Encourage further research to better understand the impact of AI on jobs and training needs for workers.
- Request Member States to invest on providing more access to workers and job seekers to high-quality and free career guidance also on the impact of AI on their work;
- Request the European Commission's Adult Learning working group to develop guidance on AI in adult learning with the involvement of trade unions, and to consider developing a competence framework for AI related skills and competences similar to DigCom[4].

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[4] Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp)