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Date: 09/10/2023

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N°16/23

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First report on the State of the Digital Decade calls for collective action to shape the digital transition



On the 27th of September, the European Commission has published its first Report on the State of the Digital Decade. This report provides a comprehensive look at progress towards achieving the digital transformation to empower a more digitally sovereign, resilient, and competitive EU. It includes an assessment of the EU's performance towards Europe's 2030 objectives and targets, focusing on four main pillars: **digital skills**, **digital infrastructure**, **digitalisation of businesses**, including the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and **digitalisation of public services**. It also includes the **monitoring of the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles**, which reflects the EU's commitment to a secure, safe and sustainable digital transformation, putting people at the center.

The 2023 report is the first in a series of annual assessments designed to track progress toward the Digital Decade objectives. It serves as a call to action for EU Member States to collectively address current investment gaps and accelerate digital transformation across Europe.

Key Pillars of Progress

Digital Infrastructure - The report highlights the need for secure gigabit coverage for all and performant 5G networks in both populated and rural areas.

Semiconductors - The EU seeks to double its global market share in cutting-edge semiconductors by 2030. The European Chips Act, which came into effect in September 2023, aims to nurture a robust semiconductor ecosystem and supply chains.

Digitalization of Businesses - The Digital Decade Policy Programme (DDPP) sets ambitious targets for business digitalization, including cloud computing, big data, and AI adoption. **Without additional investments and incentives, projected baseline figures suggest shortfalls in cloud adoption, big data usage, and AI implementation.**

Digitalization of Public Services - The DDPP envisions 100% online accessibility for key public services and **eHealth records for all Union citizens**. While many Member States are well-positioned to achieve these goals, investments are needed to enhance cross-border availability and performance.

Digital Skills - The EU aims to increase basic digital skills among **80% of those aged 16-74** and reach **20 million ICT specialists** by 2030. However, the report suggests that, under current conditions, these goals may not be met. Member States are encouraged to **prioritize investments in quality education and skills development, particularly promoting women's participation in STEM fields.**

Values and Principles - The EU remains committed to creating a secure, safe, and human-centered digital transformation. Policies such as the Digital Services Act, AI Act, European Media Freedom Act, and virtual worlds communication reflect this commitment.

Sustainable Digital Transition - The report outlines measures to make the digital transition more environmentally friendly. Initiatives like the Right to Repair, eco-design criteria for

electronics, and digitalization of energy systems aim to **reduce the environmental impact of digital technologies**.

International Partnerships - The Digital Decade underscores the importance of international cooperation. **The EU has entered digital partnerships with Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Singapore, along with Trade and Technology Councils with the United States and India. The EU is also supporting Ukraine's digital transformation efforts.**

Next Steps

The Digital Decade represents the EU's commitment to fostering innovation and investment in digitalization, and its progress is closely monitored. The path ahead may be challenging, but with collective action and investment, the EU is well on its way to achieving its digital transformation goals.

For more detailed information, click [here](#).

Vocational training will be key to meeting increasing demands for skilled workers and adapting to a changing labour market

On the 12th of September the **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)** published an article arguing that access to **vocational training** will be critical to ensure more young people can meet **increasing demands for skilled workers** and adapt to and benefit from the profound changes spurred by the **green and digital transformations**.

The OECD Education at a Glance 2023 says that 44% of all upper secondary students are enrolled in vocational education and training (VET) across the OECD. Despite this high share, vocational programs are still seen as a last resort in too many countries.

Vocational training can help **bridge the divide between schooling and employment** and **improve learning outcomes** by providing skills best acquired at work, according to the report. Strengthening the involvement of industry in VET should be a priority. Less than half of all upper secondary VET students are enrolled in programs that include elements of work-based learning.

Ensuring stronger pathways between VET and other levels of education would help. On average across OECD countries, a quarter of VET students are enrolled in upper secondary programs without direct access to tertiary education. Vocational programs must provide the required qualifications to continue studying at tertiary level. More tertiary programs also need to be designed to be built on the skills that vocational graduates have.

Better and earlier career guidance is key. Young people need access to effective career guidance to encourage them to explore more employment opportunities from an early age. Students should also be able to visit workplaces and interact with a range of workers before they have to make any final decisions.

“This year’s Education at a Glance identifies opportunities to strengthen the role of education systems in empowering young people to succeed and ensuring merit-based equality of opportunity. The number of young adults with upper secondary qualifications across the OECD

is improving, up from 82 per cent of 25 to 34-year-olds in 2015 to 86 per cent in 2022,” OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said. “However, young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds continue to fall behind. Countries need to focus on closing education gaps and provide more support to disadvantaged students and schools to give more young people the opportunity for a productive career, pay and prospects.”

Well-qualified and motivated teachers are essential for strong education systems, according to the report, but too many countries still prioritise smaller classes over raising teacher quality and making teaching careers more attractive, especially given that many OECD countries are facing teacher shortages. Average wages at primary level are 13 percent below those of other workers with tertiary education. For upper secondary teachers, the gap is still 5 percent.

Across the OECD, average statutory wages for primary and secondary teachers have grown by less than 1 per cent per year in real terms since 2015. In almost half of OECD countries, where data is available, real statutory wages have fallen. In Luxembourg, for example, real wages of upper secondary teachers have declined by 11 percent since 2015 and in Hungary the decline was 7 percent over the same period. The situation will likely worsen in many countries when taking into account the inflation of the last 12 months, says the report.

Countries should increase opportunities for career progression, reduce teachers’ administrative workload, improve the public image of teachers and boost pay in order to attract high quality teaching staff.

You may find more information about this article [here](#).

European Year of Skills: Survey highlights skills shortages in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

On the 13th of September the European Commission published an article about a new survey that confirms that skilled workers are key to the success of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Europe.



The results came on the same day as the Commission presented a set of initiatives for SME relief, which among others aims to enable a skilled workforce for SMEs to flourish by continuing to **support training actions provided by the large-scale skills partnerships** under the European Pact for Skills and other support initiatives to match skills with the needs of SMEs.

Key findings

According to the survey, 95% of all SMEs say that it is very (82%) or moderately (13%) important for their business model to have workers with the right skills.

This situation holds nearly two thirds (63%) of companies back in their general business activities. Nearly half of them (45%) also say it hinders their efforts to adopt or use digital technologies, and four in ten (39%) see difficulties to green their business activities.

SMEs already apply a broad set of measures to find and retain workers. This includes efforts to make better use of talent within the company (e.g., staff mobility or job rotation), more investment in training, or increasing the attractiveness of jobs in terms of (non-) financial benefits.

To make it easier to recruit staff with the required skills, SMEs say they need better collaboration with public employment services (58%), better tools for assessing the skills of applicants (49%), better tools for assessing the company's skills needs (46%), and easier procedures for recognition of foreign qualifications (38%).

Background

The EU supports skills development and lifelong learning with funding and policies. The European Year of Skills puts skills development centre stage and Member States have endorsed the target of at least 60% of adults participating in training every year by 2030.

Around €65 billions of EU funds are available to support education, training and skills. The European Skills Agenda and the Pact for Skills have helped companies and workers across Europe in advancing training, benefitting already 2 million people.

You may find more information on this article [here](#).

News from our Members

UNPLIB Symposium - World Week of Liberal Professions in Belgium

On the 26th of September, in the context of the Global Week of Liberal Professions, **UNPLIB (National Union of Liberal Professions of Belgium) organized a Symposium at Louvain-la-Neuve's Cercle du Lac**. The event focused on the **significance of professional Regulatory Bodies ("Ordres") in the practice of liberal professions**.

Introduced by the Vice-President of UNPLIB, **Mr. Jean Ruwet**, the Symposium was saluted by **Mr. David Clarinval**, Belgian Minister for the Self-Employed, SMEs and Agriculture, who emphasized the importance of professional regulators. **Mr. Alain Bergeau**, Vice-President of the World Union of the Liberal Professions, emphasized the need for a clear distinction between defending the rights of professionals and the role of regulatory bodies, cautioning against encroachment of responsibilities. He also stressed that regulators should perform their duties without transforming themselves into punitive bodies. **Mr. Patrick Chamboredon**, President of the Liaison Committee of Ordinal Institutions in France, and the Order of Nurses in France, encouraged Belgian professionals to follow the path recently taken by Surveyors, pointing out that several healthcare professions in the kingdom do not have professional regulators yet. **Professor Christian Mélot**, Vice-President of the National Regulator of Physicians, explained the vital role of his institution in public health, advocating for cross-sectoral regulators for healthcare professions without one. **Mr. Benjamin Hollander**, delegate of trainees from the

French Bar Association in Brussels, highlighted trainees' openness to the idea of a regulator but suggested modernization of the concept might be necessary.



Ms Natacha Léonard, President of UGEN, the Namur section of the Belgian “Ordre des Géomètres-Experts”, discussed the long journey of land surveyors, culminating in the creation of a public law Regulator for their profession this year.

A roundtable discussion featured representatives from four French-speaking Belgian political parties, all recognizing the **importance of professional regulators, and expressing their intention to incorporate measures reflecting**

this into their election programs.

Messrs. Bernard Jacquemin, President of UNPLIB and **Christophe Wambersie**, Secretary General of the Belgian Syndicat Neutre des Indépendants, have presented the conclusions of the Symposium.



Attended by 130 participants, the event, in which CEPLIS has also participated, was a success and showcased the growth and vitality of the liberal professions sector in the country.

A special thanks to **Messrs Bernard Jacquemin**, and **Jean-Yves Pirlot**, Secretary General of UNPLIB for sharing with us their report of this special day.

For further information on this event please contact our Secretariat

Portugal: ANPL's First Liberal Professional Forum: Insights and Partnerships

On the 23rd of September, the National Association of Liberal Professionals of Portugal (ANPL), has organized the country's 1st Liberal Professional Forum in the context of the World Day of Liberal Professions.

The event, presided over by its President, **Mr. Orlando Monteiro da Silva**, was an excellent opportunity to discuss ANPL's activities and projects with liberal professionals, social and

institutional partners, and influential figures in the world of organizational and labor relations from the Portuguese Parliament and Government.

At the beginning of the Day, ANPL introduced the **DataHub for Liberal Professions**, a joint initiative with Minrs – Data Driven Decisions, aimed at highlighting the significance of liberal professions in Portugal. **Ms Eunice Carrilho**, ANPL's Vice-President, and **Mr. Miguel Pais Clemente**, a member of the Fiscal Council, provided context for the Forum's various panels.



The event was saluted by **Mr. Sebastião Feyo de Azevedo**, President of the Municipal Assembly of Porto, representing the Mayor of the city, and **Mr. Francisco Assis**, President of the Portuguese Economic and Social Council (CES), who emphasized the importance of organizations like ANPL, originating from the civil society, in the country's economic and intellectual life. President **Orlando Monteiro da Silva** outlined ANPL's scope and objectives during his own address.

The panels covered a range of topics, including autonomy, independence, and professional regulation for liberal professionals, and were moderated by **Mr. Artur Miler**, a member of ANPL's Board. Panelists included **Mr. André Pinção Lucas**, Executive Director of the Instituto Mais Liberdade, **Mr. António Tavares**, Ombudsman of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Porto, **Ms Cláudia Martins Costa**, representing the General Council of the Portuguese Bar Association, and **Mr. Rui Ferraz**, Commercial Director of Innovarisk Underwriting.



Theodoros Koutroubas, Director- General of CEPLIS – European Council of Liberal Professions.

Another panel discussed liberal professionals in Europe and the world, addressing talent, representation, mobility, qualifications recognition, and continuous education. Moderated by **Mr. Filipe Novais**, President of ANPL's Fiscal Council, this panel featured **Ms Elena Córdoba Azcárate**, Director of the International Department of the Union Profesional of Spain, **Mr. Divanzir Chiminacio**, President of the National Confederation of Liberal Professions in Brazil, **Mr. Ricardo Valente**, Councilor of the Porto Municipal Council, and **Professor Dr.**

The afternoon session covered topics like representation, work, social protection, taxation, risk, and digitalization of liberal professions in Portugal. **Ms Elsa Veloso**, a Board Member of ANPL, moderated this panel, with contributions from various experts.

The event concluded with a lively debate on the Statute of Liberal Professionals in Portugal, moderated by **Mr. Fernando Rodrigues Pereira**, Vice-President of ANPL. Representatives from different political parties participated in this discussion.

The Forum's closing remarks were presented by **Mr. João Monteiro**, ANPL's Executive Secretary, and the event's final panel, moderated by **Ms Carla Teixeira Dias**, President of ANPL's General Assembly, featured **Messrs Orlando Monteiro da Silva** and **António Mendonça Mendes**, Secretary of State Adjunct to the Prime Minister, who closed the Forum on behalf of the Government.

This event served as a platform for networking, knowledge exchange, and **strengthening the role of liberal professions in Portugal**.

For further information please contact our Secretariat

Gaetano Stella, President of Confprofessioni, Reappointed to the Italian CNEL: Enhancing Professional Role and Aligning Salaries with Productivity

On the 21st of September, **Mr. Gaetano Stella**, President of the Italian Confederation of Professional Services (Confprofessioni), was **reappointed as a representative of liberal professionals in the National Council for Economics and Labor (CNEL)** for the 2023-2028 term. His appointment was published in the Official Gazette on September 18, 2023, following a resolution by the Council of Ministers on the seventh of September, designating 48 representatives from various productive sectors. After the procedural process, the inaugural meeting of the XI Consiliatura of Cnel was held on Friday, the 22nd of September, at Villa Lubin in Rome, in the presence of the **President of the Republic of Italy, Mr. Sergio Mattarella**.

"The reappointment of Confprofessioni in the new Consiliatura signifies the relevance that the sector of liberal professions has acquired in social dialogue, labor market dynamics, and, more broadly, in the country's economy. Our objective is to continue and further enhance the path taken over the last four years in support of self-employment while also strengthening our representation to achieve a greater balance between economic and productive entities tasked with identifying new solutions to align the labor market with the ongoing transition our society and economy are experiencing," **stated Counselor Stella.**



"We are currently navigating an exceedingly delicate economic and social phase where the wage issue is at the heart of a longstanding political and trade union debate that has yet to find a shared and sustainable synthesis," Stella continued. *"In this context, the new Consiliatura, led by **President Renato Brunetta**, will face decisive challenges that can only be overcome through a robust, modern, and innovative industrial relations system. This system should align wages with productivity, technological innovation, training, welfare, active labor policies, and, most importantly, strengthen collective bargaining."*

Stella concluded by highlighting the **essential role of Confprofessioni** in contributing ideas and projects within the framework of liberal professions, which align with a participatory and shared vision of social dialogue, epitomized by CNEL as its institutional platform.

For further information please contact our Secretariat