

**Dear colleagues,**

The dissemination of high-quality work-based learning is at the base of one of the pillars of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It is also at the heart of one of the most recent recommendations of the European Commission with regard to education and training.

With these premises, the Commission has promoted the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) – an initiative that brings together governments and key stakeholders with the aim of strengthening the quality, offer and overall image of apprenticeships and technical training in Europe.

As part of EAfA, the **Metropolitan City of Rome** has launched the European Network of Cities for Apprenticeships. This initiative aims to promote and strengthen the role of cities and metropolitan authorities in supporting work-based learning and their commitment to reaching the objectives of the Alliance. At this stage, it is crucial to invest in training as the main driver of sustainable and inclusive innovation and development.

As the first to join the Alliance, the Metropolitan City of Rome has developed the programme **SI, VALE! – Integrated Systems to Assess Apprenticeships, Work-Based Learning and Experience Abroad** to promote and support high-standard apprenticeships at metropolitan level.

The key role played by cities in terms of solutions and opportunities for Europe as a whole has been at the centre of discussions and exchanges for quite a while now. Over 70% of the European population lives in cities, and this figure is expected to reach 80% by 2050. Cities are where the greatest opportunities for growth and employment are found. Two-thirds of the EU's GDP is produced in urban areas, providing over 70% of the jobs available.

Cities are also where the worst environmental and social issues occur, such as housing deprivation, difficulty to access services, and physical and social degradation. Sustainable development is an established model that has had an increasing influence on European policymaking and its tools of intervention. It is promoted from both an environmental and social perspective by Europe 2020 and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Employment and competencies for local economies are included in Sustainable Development Goal 8, 'Sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth', and Sustainable Development Goal 9, 'Promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and fostering innovation'.

Cities and metropolitan authorities play a key role in the sustainable development of local communities. They are capable of building on local strengths while contributing

with strong partnerships. Cities have the potential to be a key success element for apprenticeships, from development to implementation, increasing their scale, breadth, and quality.

This is why we would like to encourage **businesses to start apprenticeship programmes in key local sectors, strengthen the capacity of professional training bodies, promote information and career guidance for young people, support the participation of the most vulnerable groups in apprenticeship programmes, and use public procurement as a tool to increase the offer of quality apprenticeships.**

This year in early January, before the world came to a grinding halt due to the pandemic, the European Commission defined the methods with which social policy can respond to today's challenges and opportunities. The Commission proposed EU-level measures for the next months and urged for a commitment on additional interventions at all levels in the employment and social rights sectors.

All countries have been working to achieve a 'socially strong Europe for a fair transition'.

The pandemic, which hit Italy particularly hard, not only had a severe social and economic impact, but it also prevented many strategic events from going ahead.

Today we celebrate the launch event for the European Network of Cities for Apprenticeships, initially scheduled to take place in Rome. Despite the format dictated by the health emergency, this event will allow us to share and develop.

The main challenge is to give a tangible form to apprenticeships and technical, professional and higher training opportunities as a tool capable of making an operational impact, within strategic metropolitan projects, on bringing together the three pillars of sustainable development – economy, society and environment. This will allow us to develop a new generation of policies that can turn the training and professional development of our citizens into a transversal approach to local government.

This workshop, organised in collaboration with the European Commission, will be an important opportunity for European cities to reflect on challenges such as the transition to an economy with zero impact on climate change and digitalisation. This is why we want to invest in the opportunities that apprenticeship programmes offer, with the aim of defining and strengthening the **connection between active labour market policies and the sustainable development of local communities** within the policies and interventions of metropolitan cities, by anchoring them to strategic sectors of the economy.

For example, in Rome, tourism and the advanced tertiary sector, as well as new sectors such as digital innovation and the circular economy, **involve different stakeholders** in innovative and/or high social impact initiatives. They develop and create **re-skilling**

programmes capable of responding to the often very rapid changes to improve social and working life, and use training as a driver towards sustainable and inclusive urban innovation and development.

We would like to take this opportunity to share ideas and experiences and translate them into tangible proposals that can be shared with the **European Commission and the European Committee of the Regions. We hope these proposals will fuel the consultative process to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights and make an impact on the new 2021–2027 cycle of European policymaking.**

As mentioned before, the main challenge is to give a tangible form to apprenticeships, vocational education and training, and higher technical education as a tool capable of making an operational impact, within strategic metropolitan projects, on integrating the three pillars of sustainable development: economy, society and environment. The work programme will allow us all to learn more about good practices in European cities, discuss new models and measures that adopt a holistic and integrated approach, promote the collaboration between local bodies, businesses, civil society and other stakeholders, and, finally, propose tangible actions to the European Commission and European Parliament in view of implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights through apprenticeships.

We wish to thank you for taking part in this webinar. We hope all proposals are shared fruitfully, and we look forward to coordinating positive strategic work for our citizens.

Rome, 11 June 2020