



# PACT for SKILLS

## Report from the roundtable

### **Pact for Skills Roundtable with Commissioner Schmit for the Proximity and Social Economy Ecosystem**

On 29 October 2020 a roundtable on skills for the Proximity and Social Economy Ecosystem chaired by Commissioner Nicolas Schmit was organised with senior representatives from the ecosystem. An exchange of views took place on how the new European Skills Agenda can support this transversal ecosystem, and obtaining commitments from the participants towards objectives of the Pact for Skills.

Commissioner Nicolas Schmit pointed out that Proximity and Social Economy has been identified as one of the 14 ecosystems to develop the EU's recovery strategy. The numerous innovative solutions that have been developed at regional and local level during the crisis are a living proof of this potential and should inspire other sectors. This ecosystem is on the one hand very diverse in terms of activities and sectors, but on the other hand very much aligned in terms of sustainable missions and purpose of business to create more local prosperity through local activity.

There was general agreement on the EU proximity and social economy ecosystem's capacity for resilience and on its role in reskilling and upskilling activities related to the economic recovery process.

The relevance of this ecosystem for the Pact for Skills, due to its human centric-approach, was shared by all participants. In terms of local and regional economic development, this ecosystem is key, as it is often the last resort after economic activity disappeared. In such realities, Social Economy is able to bring positive economic prospects by social innovation and strategic economic cooperation. For example, the successful initiatives to bring digital technology and skills in most remote and rural territories were illustrated as well as skills and technology programs focusing on

tackling youth unemployment (NEETS) in most in economically deprived city districts. That makes capacity-building activities for social entrepreneurs crucial as it allows them to multiply this entrepreneurial spirit. Entrepreneurial skills are not only important to start a business but also to use these skills within established enterprises and civil society organisations, as so called 'intrapreneurs'.

Finally, there was a general request for EU supported local economic partnerships, such as clusters and innovation partnerships, in close co-operation with national and regional efforts to meet this skills challenge. There was a broad welcome for the Pact for Skills and the possibility to create such partnerships for more targeted curricula, training and skills programs at the proximity and social economy ecosystem level.

Participants suggested principles and concrete successful examples they are committed to scale in the context of the Pact for Skills such as:

- Mapping successful reskilling and upskilling practices to replicate inside the ecosystem but also in other ecosystems;
- Support green skills development with specific sectoral applications approaches and curricula, for example in construction, electronics, circular economy, biodiversity, etc.
- Reaching out to most remote areas is crucial, however capacity building is not enough. A key element to foster digitalisation is connectivity (4G and broadband) as well as easily accessible technology; Developing rural Digital Innovation Hubs;
- Specific skills programs (combined with a more integrated support structure) needed for citizens that are most vulnerable in our society and provide the adequate network to translate this into employment opportunities.
- Make skills acquisition inclusive and empowering for target groups, for example by the use of technology and alternative work organisations – as identified in the *blueprint for sectoral skills* on Work Integration Social Enterprises – B-WISE PROJECT.
- Recognising the important role that local and regional training centres and clusters can play in identifying skill needs, development of curricula and training activities, and allow trans -sector interactions with unfamiliar partners.
- Support the creation of “fablabs” (or creative commons) where technology is available and where youngsters can be challenged in using technologic skills acquisition to apply and test the tools;
- Developing clusters as places of mutual and collective learning, technology access and pooling of investment capital for social entrepreneurs (Torino Social Impact model);
- Recognise the role of social economy in targeted support to reskilling and upskilling via smart specialisation;
- Not only promoting the use of AI but also cooperative intelligence (Mondragon example)
- Linking high-tech and social economy (example of Minddistrict in Milan);
- Developing (social) innovation camps, to spread the entrepreneurial culture and mind-set among youngsters including social economy enterprises
- Establishing regional innovation centres that develop partnerships with local companies to create training programs in line with local business needs, for green and digital innovation in particular (example of social entrepreneurial centres like Bilbao)

- Teaching targeted mainstream professional groups such as engineers and designers about principles of social economy (reverse teaching principle);
- Support the creation of (European) Social Economy Business Schools
- Promote a market for European Impact Investors and financial instruments targeting social businesses as well as social investment reskilling and upskilling of target groups;
- Including social economy in broader industrial policy framework.

These ideas will be further explored and developed during expert workshops.

The participants were encouraged to pass the message to their governments to include Social Economy in national Recovery and Resilient Plans. Finally, the role of the Proximity and Social Economy Ecosystem in disseminating skills will have to be included in the upcoming Action Plan for Social Economy.