



PACT for SKILLS

Report from the roundtable

Pact for Skills Roundtable with Commissioners Kyriakides, Schmit and Breton for the health ecosystem

The Pact for Skills Roundtable on the health ecosystem, chaired by Commissioners Kyriakides, Schmit and Breton on 16 February 2021, brought together high-level representatives from health professionals, patients, social partners, research and industry. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the challenges faced by the ecosystem, the needs of reskilling and upskilling, to identify best practices and solutions by stakeholders mobilised under the Pact for Skills framework and to obtain concrete commitments for action.

This roundtable was part of a series of sectoral roundtables to foster stakeholder involvement under the Pact for Skills. The objective of the Pact is to mobilise all relevant actors to assist people in developing the right skill-set for a sustainable, social and resilient recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. The health ecosystem is complex and multi-faceted and it was decided to focus this roundtable on one aspect that of the digital skills of the current and future health workforce while leaving the participants the possibility to raise other needs in skills as well.

The emphasis was on the potential for digital technologies and digital skills to transform the health practitioner-patient relationship, improve health outcomes, support interdisciplinary working and strengthen the resilience of health systems.

This roundtable has made it evident that there is a need to upskill and reskill healthcare workers. There was broad agreement that up- and re-skilling in regard to digital skills required specific attention as technological progress on digitalisation is fundamentally changing healthcare. Also the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need and potential for digital health solutions to support healthcare workers in providing the best possible care to patients. Digitalisation should not put an added burden on health professionals, but should increase efficiency and free up time for quality patient care. Collective agreements and social dialogue can support this and build trust among health professionals.

As health is highly regulated, participants pointed out that in addition to training in digital skills, digital technologies need to be embedded in normal care pathways, financed appropriately and have the right legal and governance framework for widespread use. Training on digital technologies is essential for all healthcare professions at all ages and should be embedded in their day-to-day work. There should be appropriate incentives for training and continuous evaluation.

In addition to upskilling the existing workforce, we need to educate the next generation of health workers and review their training curricula. Patients' experience and needs should be taken into account in the design and roll-out of curricula, as well as in day-to-day practice. Health professionals also pointed out the key role that health workers have in explaining digital solutions to patients. This goes hand-in-hand with shifting care closer to the patient's home. Digital solutions and skills are therefore not only needed in the hospital sector, but also in primary and community-based care.

The widely unused potential of digital technologies for multi-professional cooperation and learning, also across borders, is still to be exploited.

There is a need to build trust in new technologies, such as AI algorithms, to ensure they do not undermine patient safety. Digital technologies can enable health professionals to process, combine and use unprecedented amounts of data – for example, for research and clinical decision-making. Healthcare workers need to be trained to handle such data in clinical practice – technically and according to ethical standards.

Apart from the needs and gaps in digital skills, other mismatches were identified in skills in health innovation in primary care, soft skills, leadership and advocacy, collaborative competencies and others. There was broad agreement on the need to work together. The European Commission invited stakeholders to come forward with concrete proposals for a Pact for Skills in healthcare, with a focus on digital skills, and a number of stakeholders have expressed their interest in joining activities in the Pact.

The Commission is willing and ready to support commitments and concrete actions under the Pact for Skills. By joining the Pact, stakeholders will get access to networking, knowledge, guidance and resources regarding quality upskilling and reskilling. Financial instruments, such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility, ESF+, Erasmus+, REACT-EU, Digital Europe Programme or Invest EU can support up- and reskilling of healthcare workers as part of the Pact.

