A SOCIAL PARTNERS' FRAMEWORK OF ACTIONS

Challenges and opportunities of the digitalisation for the workforce in the European Electricity Sector

eurelectric

industriAll
EUROPEAN TRADE UNION

EPSU
EUROPEAN PUBLIC SERVICE UNION

A SOCIAL PARTNERS' FRAMEWORK OF ACTIONS

Challenges and opportunities of the digitalisation for the workforce in the European Electricity Sector

Referring to the framework of actions anticipating change

Referring to the skills study recommendations

Referring to the Social Partners Roadmap

Referring to the Social Partners' Work Programme 2017-2018 and the Work Programme 2019-2020

The European Social Partners in the Electricity Sector have decided to further define their actions and discussions in the following Framework of Actions.

Defining work and employment conditions in the digitalised Electricity Sector

With the present Framework of Actions the European Social Partners in the Electricity Sector intend to address the challenges and opportunities that digitalisation has on employment conditions and workers/employees. Representing the Trade Unions and the Employers in the European Electricity sector, we want to shape the process of digitalising our sector in a way that benefits companies, their workers and customers equally. In this respect social dialogue is crucial for the social partners at all levels (European, national, sectoral and company level) in anticipation of the change that the digitalised electricity sector brings

The electricity sector is in the midst of a transformation, as technology and innovation disrupt traditional models from generation to beyond the smart-meter. In addition to the electrification and decentralisation, digitalisation is considered one of the "grid edge" transformations, i.e. hardware, software and business innovations that are increasingly enabling smart, connected infrastructure to be installed in proximity to end-use customers.

It is clear that this technological and business transformation impact on the way workers carry out their jobs. That is why the European Social Partners in the Electricity Sector have identified some key aspects that will be crucial to address during the coming years at the various levels of social dialogue.

Key aspects of the impact of digitalisation on the world of work and how to address them

The overall impact of digitalisation on employment

It is difficult to estimate the impact of digitalisation and automated processes on the overall employment figures and the structure of employment. However, we can expect significant changes in job profiles, with some tasks becoming obsolete because of advanced digitalised and automated processes. Restructuring is indeed the biggest concern for trade unions, their biggest fear being job cuts and the increase of precarious forms of employment caused by enhanced digitalised processes.

It is clear that technological change brings a redefinition to job and skills profiles. In this context it is even more important that social partners take the lead to shape the transformation of the world of work by creating a working and learning environment that benefits everybody. Digitalisation should not be conceived as a threat affecting companies and employees, but as a challenging opportunity to become smarter and innovative not only in terms of organisation, communication and connectivity, but also of job profiles. The timely anticipation of change and information and consultation of employees will be important to tackle head on challenges posed by digitalisation . Through social dialogue and the effective participation of the workforce and works councils at company level digitalisation in the electricity sector can therefore be turned into a mutual success for companies and their employees.

Recommended actions

- Exchange of good practices, with a focus on collective agreements, in the framework of the European Social Dialogue Committee Electricity (SSDC) that aim at making the digital transition socially just and responsible.

- European Social Partners will define guidelines in the case of restructuring due to the introduction of digitalisation

Delivery date 2020

Qualitative impact on employment

Tackling the skills dimension

According to the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education and Training (CEDEFOP) the future structural transformation of EU labour markets is closely linked with a high demand for advanced digital skills. This indeed poses some questions concerning the current state of education systems, in particular vocational education and training, but also continuous training and life-long learning systems, and whether they are able to keep pace with the skills demands. Education systems have to be up-to-date responding to new realities and continuously updated in line with technological developments. They need to ensure that new entrants to the labour market are equipped with the right skills, while experienced/older employees have access to adequate re- and upskilling through continuous professional development and life-long learning. In order to maintain know-how, mentorship systems can foster a learning environment based on knowledge flows (old to young – young to old).

The European Social Partners have been addressing the future skills needs relevant to the current drivers of change, i.e. decarbonisation, digitalisation and new business models in a recent study that resulted in a set of recommendations to the different stakeholders, i.e. the European Commission, the European Social Partners themselves, the national social partners, the local authorities and vocational training providers.

As a result of the study and its recommendations the European Social Partners have agreed on a Roadmap on education, training and tackling skills gaps in the sector for the next 4-6 years. The main actions will be:

1. Strengthening the role of the social partners in the interaction with vocational education and training (VET) systems and skills providers

2. Maintaining and updating sectoral intelligence on skills needs in order to periodically revise strategies and actions

3. Negotiating a Quality Framework for Apprenticeships

4. Defining and implementing a systematic strategy to improve the attractiveness of the sector to potential employees and develop a diverse workforce through a European project

5. Ensuring mobile and transferable skills in the electricity sector

6. Anticipating skills needs for workers in a context of decarbonisation and digitalisation of the electricity sector

In order to implement the recommendations of the Roadmap Social Partners have decided to engage in a follow-up project to build capacities at national level for social partners to engage in effective and continuous skills partnerships with vocational education and training providers that can deliver on maintaining intelligence on skills needs and employment trends.

Creating comprehensive life-long learning and career development schemes

Life-long learning is an important aspect of professional growth, as it allows employees to keep up with new technologies and workflows thus increasing both productivity and employability. It allows companies to get more value from their experienced senior employees and to improve the long-term career prospects and job satisfaction of new hires.

At company level, every worker should have a right to training and life-long learning. Training needs to be dynamic, taking into account the different levels of digital literacy in the workforce and, although starting from different levels, aim to bring all workers to the same high standards. Moreover, it should be comprehensive and formally validated with transferable qualifications that are beneficial for the individual worker for personal development. It should form part of a holistic programme of continuous professional development that prepares workers in advance for skills changes in the company and in the sector in general.

Recommended action:

At EU level it will be crucial to work on the implementation of the Social Partner Roadmap on skills and qualifications and continue working on the project recommendations.

But also national social partners at sectoral level are addressed in the social partner roadmap and will have to play an important role in creating stronger partnerships between social partners, VET providers, local and regional governments to proactively anticipate changing skills profiles and continuously exchange on updating educational profiles at all levels of social dialogue.

Working Conditions:

Offering high quality working and employment conditions in the digitalised electricity sector should be a major objective also as a means to offer an attractive work environment for the younger generations. Digitalisation and remote working have the potential

to contribute to this objective, but carry a number of challenges that should be considered in order to provide an attractive, healthy and safe electricity sector.

Changes in work organisation (increased possibilities for mobile work or increased individualisation of work, etc.) have an impact on the quality of work and therefore on the quality of life of workers. These challenges have to be turned into opportunities. Workers must be able to benefit from enhanced technological possibilities. Digital processes must enable individual workers to be more autonomous and have more to say in their work organisation, support them in solving problems and make their jobs more enriching.

One of the objectives of the electricity sector, its companies and its workers is to avoid health and safety risks that could be caused by a digitalised work environment: such as technostress, chronic fatigue, concentration problems, attention deficit disorders, burnout, etc. which put workers at risk of not properly managing their priorities and their time, and generating feelings of panic or guilt. The European Social Partners invite their national affiliates to develop strategies to prevent psycho-social risks at the workplace that could significantly affect workers, organisations and even national economies, in accordance with national legislation and collective agreements.

Opportunities and challenges of increased workers flexibility

Digitalisation in the electricity sector may provide for more flexibility of employees in terms of working time and place and contribute to the work-life balance of employees, as it enables a large part of the workforce to perform tasks in any place and at any time. Indeed, working time is a key element of working conditions that needs to be continuously evaluated in the light of new technology and new forms of employment. Remote work must deliver a better work-life balance whereas the risks associated with mobile work (constant availability, impact on health etc.) must be limited.

The social partners agree on the importance of recognising the right to disconnect and remain committed to safeguarding working time arrangements and well-being at work. The signatories work towards its implementation in accordance with European/national legislation and collective agreements. The European social partners will continue promoting social dialogue at national, sectoral or company level to find progressive solutions ensuring electricity workers' health, well-being and work-life balance including socially responsible arrangements on remote working and the right to disconnect.

The Working Time Directive provides the framework in Europe that needs to be respected including increasing use of mobile technology and telework arrangements. Telework or smart work arrangements should improve, not worsen, employees' work-life balance. Moreover, the health and safety environment has to be adapted to new work processes brought about by digitalisation. This also means providing safe, regular and secure employment conditions in order to prevent psychosocial risks.

Recommended action:

There are good examples of collective agreements in some companies, hence an exchange of good practices in the SSDC could facilitate a discussion about some further work on psychosocial risks and the right to disconnect at European, but also at national level, where this has not been initiated.

Data protection and the handling of worker-related data

Monitoring and surveillance at work were identified by the European Commission as an area where European action could be taken in a two-stage social partner consultation on data protection at work in 2001-2002.[1] However, this did not lead to any concrete outcomes and data protection for workers is still governed by the general EU rules on data protection, most recently the General Data Protection Regulation which entered into force in May 2018.[2] Data processing in the employment context is subject to article 88 of the GDPR, however, it is left to each member states to define more specific rules: "*Member States may, by law or by collective agreements, provide for more specific rules to ensure the protection of the rights and freedoms in respect of the processing of employees' personal data in the employment context (…)*".[3] The European Social Partners in the Electricity Sector support stronger data protection legislation for workers but it is also necessary to introduce stronger safeguards for workers through social dialogue and information and consultation of the workforce at various levels.

There are clear and legitimate purposes of the surveillance of work, such as ensuring the smooth performance of work processes and ensuring health and safety of workers, particularly for lone workers. However, surveillance should take place in a reasonable framework agreed between companies and workers. Workers need to be informed what data is collected, have access to data and data should be used only for the purposes agreed between companies and workers. The use of data arising from AI and algorithms should never be used to measure worker's performance.

Workers' rights and privacy need to be protected and psychosocial risks through non-permissive use of collected data must be prevented.[4]

---

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=708
[2] https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection_en
[3] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32016R0679
[4] The European Social Partners aim to promote safeguard measures against any use of collected data that is not permitted by law and/or by collective agreements

Recommended action:

There are a number of collective agreements in some companies that offer good examples of tackling the issue of the protection of worker-related data. Social Partners at sectoral and company level should commence discussions to find joint solutions to provide for transparency of data usage and prevent abuse of data and psycho-social risks.

European Social Partners will exchange best practices drawn from national examples on the usage of worker related data. Building upon them, the European social partners will join forces to provide national affiliates with indicative guidelines for the use of such data.

Follow up and implementation

This Framework of Actions intends to set an outline of future social partner activities, negotiations and agreements focussing on the respective key aspects identified above. The European Social Partners commit to take stock of the resulting activities regularly within the European Social Dialogue Committee for the Electricity Sector.

The European social partners commit to implement this FoA by the end of the next Work Plan (2022) and, after completion, to carry out an assessment of what has been achieved and update the FoA if the above-defined issues are still relevant and if additional topics could be included.

EURELECTRIC represents the common interests of the electricity industry at pan-European level. Our current members represent the electricity industry in over 30 European countries. We also have affiliates and associations on several other continents.

www.eurelectric.org

industriAll European Trade Union is the voice of industrial workers ali over Europe. It represents 7 million workers across supply chains in manufacturing, mining and energy sectors on the European level.

www.industriAll-europe.eu

EPSU is the European Federation of Public Service Unlons. It is the largest federation of the ETUC and comprises 8 million public service workers from over 250 trade unions across Europe. EPSU organises workers in the energy, water and waste sectors, health and social services and local, regional and central government, in ali European countries including the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. It is the recognised regional organisation of Public Services International (PSI).

www.epsu.org