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AK Position Paper

Communication on Digital Education Action Plan

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About us

The Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour is by law representing the interests of about 3.6 million employees and consumers in Austria. It acts for the interests of its members in fields of social-, educational-, economical-, and consumer issues both on the national and on the EU-level in Brussels. Furthermore the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour is a part of the Austrian social partnership. The Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour is registered at the EU Transparency Register under the number 23869471911-54.

The AK EUROPA office in Brussels was established in 1991 to bring forward the interests of all its members directly vis-à-vis the European Institutions.

Organisation and Tasks of the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour

The Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour is the umbrella organisation of the nine regional Chambers of Labour in Austria, which have together the statutory mandate to represent the interests of their members.

The Chambers of Labour provide their members a broad range of services, including for instance advice on matters of labour law, consumer rights, social insurance and educational matters.

More than three quarters of the 2 million member-consultations carried out each year concern labour-, social insurance- and insolvency law. Furthermore the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour makes use of its vested right to state its opinion in the legislation process of the European Union and in Austria in order to shape the interests of the employees and consumers towards the legislator.

All Austrian employees are subject to compulsory membership. The member fee is determined by law and is amounting to 0.5% of the members' gross wages or salaries (up to the social security payroll tax cap maximum). 816.000 - amongst others unemployed, persons on maternity (paternity) leave, community and military service - of the 3.6 million members are exempt from subscription payment, but are entitled to all services provided by the Austrian Federal Chambers of Labour.

Rudi Kaske
President

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Director

Executive Summary

Digital competences and qualifications are a prerequisite for individuals to be able to participate in society and the labour market. Therefore, the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour (AK) expressly welcomes the measures announced in the Digital Education Action Plan.

AK considers **Priority 2**, which addresses strengthening digital skills and competences, to be especially key. However, Priority 2 should focus more on the following two aspects, in order for everyone to be able to participate in the digital transformation.

One emphasis of the Action Plan should be on **supporting socially disadvantaged young people** to acquire digital skills, because opportunities to acquire skills are not equally distributed but are highly dependent on people's social background. A study of young people conducted by AK shows that the "digital divide" among young people runs along the lines of social inequality.¹

A second important focus of Priority 2 should be placed on **further education and training** because ongoing training is becoming increasingly important with the digital transformation. Those with low formal qualifications are especially vulnerable to changes in the world of work. Various studies show that occupations, which require only low qualifications, or which have a high percentage of repetitive tasks, will be less in demand². That is why **those with low formal qualifications** need more sup-

port in the field of digital education and training.

In order to prevent the digital divide from taking deeper hold, the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour advocates initiating the following measures within the scope of Priority 2:

- specific measures to support socially disadvantaged young people in the acquisition of digital skills
- ensure that all young people or schools dealing with socially disadvantaged youth can participate and benefit from all measures to promote digital skills (e.g. Code Week)
- offer specific measures in the field of further training, in particular to support those with low formal qualifications
- support Member States in developing further education and training strategies.

The AK's position in detail

The Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour welcomes the Digital Education Action Plan to strengthen digital education in Europe. However, the AK believes that these measures should focus on two groups in particular in order to ensure that everyone can participate in the digital transformation: socially disadvantaged youth in initial training and those with low formal qualifications in further training.

Priority 1: Making better use of digital technology for teaching and learning

Improving the digital infrastructure is a necessary precondition for digital education. As defined in the Action Plan, improved access of all children to digital infrastructure can help to reduce inequality and exclusion. Therefore, AK welcomes the measures included under Priority 1. However, in the opinion of the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour, all programmes should pay special attention to supporting disadvantaged students or types of schools.

The planned improvements in validation and recognition are positive factors. Due to the increasing importance of workplace-related learning and on-the-job training, the competences acquired must be made visible and recognised.

Priority 2: Developing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation

Digital competences are a precondition for people being able to participate in a society undergoing digital transforma-

tion. This is why in the opinion of the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour, Priority 2 is especially key. Projects such as "bring coding classes to all schools", measures to improve cyber-security and media competence, and promoting girls in digital education, are a positive step.

However, AK believes that one aspect should be given more prominence: opportunities to acquire skills are unevenly distributed according to social background. Thus, this Action Plan should also include specific measures with the explicit aim of breaking down digital divides among young people. In addition to specific measures to combat the digital divide, it must be ensured that in particular schools or groups of young people faced with social disadvantages can participate in all existing and future support programmes. If only those who already have good access to digital education can benefit from programmes such as Code Week, this would increase the digital divide as a result.

The digital transformation and continuous changes in the working world mean that regular further training is becoming increasingly important. Therefore, life-long learning, and in particular supporting those with low formal qualifications, is another aspect that should be given more weight. Those with low formal qualifications are particularly affected by changes in the labour market, as has been stated in the Action Plan and in the "Upskilling Pathways"- Initiative³. Therefore the Federal Chamber of Labour is calling for specific measures to be creat-

ed to sponsor further training initiatives for those with low formal qualifications. Furthermore, Member States should be supported in developing further education and training strategies.

The Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour also welcomes the fact that Priority 2 programmes will support the promotion of open science at universities. However, the question of freely accessible knowledge and open educational resources should also be driven forward on school level. Member States could be offered a platform and peer-learning opportunities so they can exchange experiences on the introduction and use of open educational resources in schools. On this basis, Member States should be advised to develop national plans to ensure broad use of open educational resources.

Priority 3: Improving education systems through better data analysis and foresight

Since digital competences are becoming increasingly important, they also should be included into scientific investigations of educational standards. Thus, AK welcomes the fact that studies such as PIAAC or PISA will in future address digital competences. Sound scientific data foundation can help to respond to new developments and improve educational systems.

When applying data-driven education (e.g. learning analytics), special attention must be paid to respecting the personality rights of learners and teachers, as well as to data protection. Decisions about educational paths and assessment of performance will have to be determined by professionally-trained educators and not by algorithms. Pilot projects and guidelines for Member

States in the field of data-driven education should therefore focus on personality rights and data protection.

Conclusions

The Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour welcomes the Digital Education Action Plan. However, as stated above, in the opinion of the AK greater focus should be placed on supporting socially disadvantaged youth and those with low formal qualifications in the field of further education and training. Since these two groups are particularly affected by digitisation, they should receive special support so they can acquire digital competences.

¹ https://media.arbeiterkammer.at/wien/PDF/studien/bildung/Digitale_Kompetenzen_Kurzbericht.pdf

² http://plattformindustrie40.at/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/WEB_Industrie4.0_Ergebnispapier-Qualifikation-und-Kompetenzen.pdf

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224>

Should you have any further questions
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