



# NEWSLETTER

## Report of the SKY final seminar at the European Economic Social Committee on 09/02/24.

The SKY project, funded as part of ERASMUS +, brought together five European organisations specialising in supporting the integration of vulnerable, disadvantaged and long-term unemployed people into working life for two years, from 2022 to 2024. The 5 partners contributing to the SKY project, led by the European network CEC Acting for Social Inclusion, are as follows: AGFE France, BARKA Poland, TRINIJOVE Spain and SCF Italy.

The aim of the SKY project was to offer an alternative to traditional back-to-work schemes, which are often based on skills assessments followed by training courses leading to qualifications that do not correspond to the expectations or attention span of the long-term unemployed. These people often say that skills training programmes are too long, complex and difficult to follow, given their precarious situation and their distance from the realities of the labour market. What's more, the digital divide is becoming an almost insurmountable obstacle for adults in difficulty. It has been observed that training programmes leading to qualifications are increasingly based on a combination of skills already formulated in the ISCO (International Standard Classification of Occupations) databases and ESCO (European Classification of Skills, Certification and Occupations). The rationalised and contemporary approach to educational engineering has resulted in a weakening of the relationship between integration/training structures and companies, where the voice of workers is no longer sufficiently taken into account. In response to these problems of traditional learning, the SKY partners have chosen to develop short training sequences - known as micro-training - that are directly in line with the needs of companies in jobs where there is a shortage of labour. The micro-training courses have been designed in close collaboration with the companies, based on an analysis of professional gestures and attitudes in the workplace. Analysing employees' gestures and attitudes was the first step in re-establishing human contact and taking into account the reality of the practices actually carried out by employees in companies. SKY has endeavoured to go beyond the rationalisation of skills repositories by integrating a human and sensitive dimension.

The methodology for analysing practices was to "watch, observe, see, analyse and understand" the actions and attitudes of the workers, using their words and their own words. Videos of their own professional actions were produced to serve both as teaching resources and to promote the profession to jobseekers. This humanist and pragmatic approach, centred on actions and attitudes, elicited many reactions from the audience.

"The skills in the training reference frameworks are already extracted from work activities and tasks, so why redo what has already been done? True, but it is the administrative departments that prescribe



the activities and tasks required for the job, without taking into account the testimonies and vision of the job by the workers.

"Companies are reluctant to take video footage in their workshops for reasons of confidentiality". "Companies don't have the time to devote to job analyses and don't want to give workers a voice". However, with SKY, some companies have opened their doors and some have offered to make their own videos of work processes.

The partnerships between the integration/training organisations and the companies were based on mutual trust in order to be able to develop micro-training tailored to the needs of professional practices. It should be noted, however, that the SKY project did not involve workers' and employers' trade union representatives, which would have allowed for shared points of view. The online contribution by Tatiana Babrauskiene, member of the EESC's workers' representatives, underlined the importance of social dialogue in building micro-training pathways as part of a win-win strategy for all stakeholders, in order to facilitate the recognition of professional skills, strengthen competences and ensure the mobility of workers within the EU.

Over and above the necessary and indispensable interrelationship between companies and integration/training organisations, SKY has set itself the objective of restoring the desire to learn in the long-term unemployed. The micro-training courses delivered to more than 150 beneficiaries in short-staffed occupations in the 5 European countries have been very well received by people who are a long way from employment. SKY has restored a taste for lifelong learning, boosted self-esteem and provided new motivation to enter working life. As one beneficiary put it, "this micro-training woke me up". Also, the vivid testimony from the podium of an unemployed person who had experienced terrible social exclusion and who had found a form of resilience thanks to the micro-training courses strengthened everyone's conviction in the SKY project's concrete, person-centred approach.

The 5 partners have benefited mutually from each other's expertise. One organisation has developed and shared new tools for selecting and deciphering candidates' motivations for taking micro-training courses. Another documented and disseminated the micro-training courses and the methods used to assess learning outcomes. A third structured and disseminated the teaching resources and video synopses. However, the return on investment in the development and implementation of micro-training courses is of concern to all stakeholders. Traditional training courses are currently financed on the basis of the time spent by trainees and sometimes by a lump sum for the construction of programmes and teaching resources.

Given that the duration of micro-training courses (limited to 24 hours for SKY) is very short, the reference to funding per hour of attendance is no longer viable for training organisations. In addition, the individualisation of micro-training courses, based on the abilities and skills of beneficiaries, makes it impossible to fill short training sessions with a large number of trainees. Some participants in the room suggested establishing a flat-rate cost for micro-training that would no longer depend on the hour of training but would focus on learning outcomes and short-term employability goals. SKY's objective was to encourage a rapid return to employment through enhanced intermediation between companies, training integration organisations and long-term jobseekers. The micro-training courses, tailored as closely as possible to the staffing needs of occupations experiencing recruitment shortages



and adapted to the skill levels of the unemployed, enabled them either to return to work or to pursue further training.

Fabrice Meeuw, Managing Director of the Constructiv sector fund in Belgium, fully supports the principle of micro-training courses for the construction sector, which is in growing demand for labour throughout Europe. These micro-training courses enable people to find immediate employment in a wide range of building trades, with no qualifications required.

Recognition of the learning outcomes assessed during the micro-training, in the form of a progression of knowledge and skills, was formalised by a tripartite gentleman's agreement between the company, the training organisation and the trainee. The gentleman's agreement enabled a micro-certification to be issued to the trainees, which cannot yet be transposed to other situations. It does, however, constitute a formalisation of skills and knowledge that can be claimed as acquired experience. The criteria of autonomy and responsibility in the European certification framework are difficult to identify in the practice of professional activities, which are necessarily limited to a few tasks.

The question is whether a micro-certification of limited duration is sufficient to carry out a professional activity at a workstation independently and with full responsibility. For this, other indicators of qualification levels beyond autonomy and responsibility certainly need to be defined and tested in order to integrate micro-certifications into national qualification frameworks. The SKY project's micro-certifications provoked a number of reactions from the floor. Isable Ladron-Arroyo, representative of the European Commission's DG Employment in charge of implementing the European Council's recommendation for a European approach to micro-certifications, supported the SKY project as a positive experiment in line with European objectives.

As with any innovative system, some of the comments made by participants referred back to habits and positions that were sometimes orthodox. "The gentleman's agreement is too complex for trainees", "the micro-certification has no legal value", "it only validates access to sub-jobs", "a single company involved does not make it possible to justify standard know-how in the way that national diplomas do". A pertinent comment from a young trainee concerned the remuneration of professional activity linked to the absence of a qualification level for micro-certifications. "Won't micro-certifications encourage companies to pay less to those who only have micro-certifications?"

The SKY project has met the 2 challenges it set itself, namely to encourage the desire to relearn and to give the long-term unemployed a foothold in the labour market by working for companies in the commercial sector. All the stakeholders are massively involved in SKY, in the conviction that the innovation brought about by micro-training in professional skills and the system of micro-certifications is a guarantee of flexibility in lifelong learning. In order to guarantee wider recognition of micro-certifications, a quality assurance system needs to be devised, and the involvement of the public authorities will be essential, at least at regional level.