



“The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe”

SME needs have to be better recognised in digitalisation process

UEAPME President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller stresses at Round Table with Commissioner Oettinger: “Improved education systems & more awareness raising are highly necessary for more SME innovation & job creation”

Brussels, 20th September 2016 – We now live at a time where digital skills are crucial to the economy, to innovation and to creating jobs in all sectors. This is particularly true for SMEs. UEAPME President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller met Commissioner Oettinger at a Round Table on Digital Skills for the European labour force, alongside other stakeholders, to discuss the challenges and solutions to the digital skills shortage across Europe. Ms Rabmer-Koller put forward the various situations of SMEs regarding digitalisation and then presented the actions UEAPME and its member organisations are taking to face this challenge, including awareness raising, exchange of good practices and through social dialogue.



Digital skills are crucial. The challenge in digitalising Europe overall is that Crafts and SMEs are very diverse in size and sectors and therefore can be divided into three groups where each one requires a specific approach to getting them to speed up regarding digitalisation. The two extremes are the start-ups – generally developing new business models with highly skilled digital experts – and the micro-companies that do not use ICT at all and need support at a very basic level. However, the vast majority of European SMEs are those in between these two extremes, i.e. the ones in need of neutral and objective information, advice and guidance on the potential of digital skills, on how to identify digital skills needs and how to acquire them with the right training.

This diversity among SMEs is a challenge in addressing the digital skills shortages. A major step in tackling the digital challenge is to start with Education and Training Systems, including the up-skilling of teachers and trainers, to teach basic digital skills at school. Alongside the educational aspect, up-skilling the workforce is an essential part of the process, this can be done through the transfer of skills between ICT SMEs and more traditional ones. So far, many small companies outsource some digital tasks by using services provided by ICT companies as they are immediately available and less costly in the short term.

The main role of SME organisations in the digitalisation of SMEs include: raising awareness through UEAPME’s project “[CloudingSMEs](#)”, regular exchange of good practices, social dialogue with UEAPME’s adoption of a [joint statement on digitalisation](#) with the other EU social partners and future joint work as part of the [EU Social Partners’ Work Programme 2017](#).

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EDITORS’ NOTES: UEAPME is the employers’ organisation representing Crafts and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 64 member organisations covering about 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information please visit <http://www.ueapme.com/> or follow [@UEAPME](#) on Twitter.

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