

Digital #Upskilling4All

Project



with the Financial Support
of the European Commission

Digital #Upskilling4All

Digital Upskilling for All! (DUFA) is a two-year social dialogue project that aims to develop best practices and create recommended pathways for digital upskilling, inclusion, and diversity within the workforce of the European Telecoms sector.

The number of vacancies for highly skilled ICT roles is increasing exponentially and the sector cannot meet this demand by recruiting from the traditional ICT talent pool alone. To bridge this skills gap and to promote inclusion and diversity, Telecommunication companies are seeking to upskill their existing workforce and recruit new talent from a much broader diversity group.

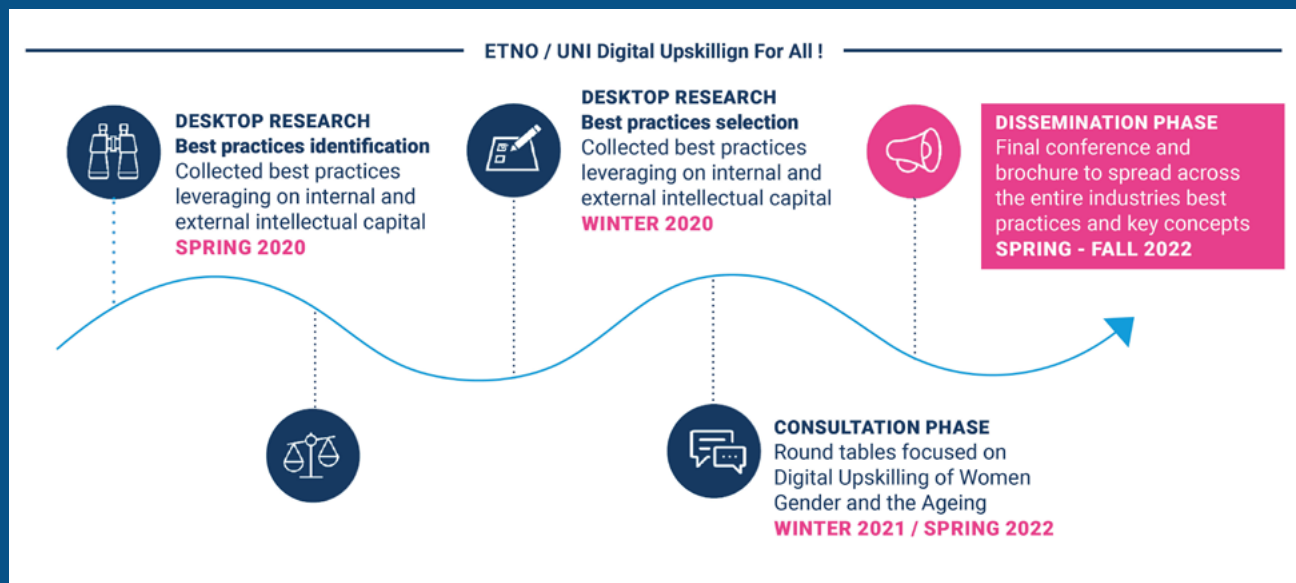
For this reason, the European social partners in the Telecom sector - the European Telecommunications Network Operators' Association (ETNO) and the European services workers union UNI Europa, have jointly undertaken to review sectoral and academic best practices and develop a package of recommended initiatives that will enable digital upskilling to be embedded within the diversity group of their work population.

This action seeks to bridge the growing digital skills gap among the telecom's workforce in Europe, with a particular focus on developing upskilling pathways to ensure gender equality in ICT roles and creating new opportunities through the retraining of older workers with new digital skills.

It also aims to recruit new talent into the sector within the European labour market, enabling access to highly skilled ICT roles from broader diversity groups in the future. The project encourages the upskilling and inclusion of underrepresented minorities such as neurodiverse people or those with disabilities, different ethnicities, refugees or the LGBTQIA+ community.



Overview of the DUFA methodology



The project started with the constitution of a project steering group representing experts from ETNO members and UNI Europa ICTS affiliates. Their first task was the selection of Mercer, a company with expertise in Diversity and Inclusion transformation to carry out the project research and help guide the discussion through consultation and dissemination of the contents.

In spring 2020, Mercer and the steering group defined the parameters for desktop research leveraging on internal and external studies, aimed at identifying best practices according to the real impact of the program in achieving strategic and tactical goals (scalability focusing level, future alignment) and context (applicability in the European Telecom industry, duration, resources, innovation degree).

The result was a considerable list of best practices that met the specific scope of the research on digital upskilling and diversity. The identified programs were assembled in three categories: gender diversity, age, and technology upskilling.

In the meantime, Mercer developed a questionnaire for a deep-dive interview with representatives of the telecom social partners (Telecom companies and trade unions in the sector) to understand the current status as well as potential roadblocks to roll out such initiatives.

Having examined the survey results, we can find some interesting findings: 94% of organisations have a long-term digital strategy, however only 19% of programs involve female population, and no programs were identified for aging workers (50+ years of age).

Furthermore, companies have different levels of maturity. Looking at the progression of digital upskilling, we can see that 54% of the organisations are currently in the “analyse & plan” stage. This was established from 28 votes in the live polling conducted during the closing DUFA conference May 2022, held in Lisbon, which had a remarkable attendance from participating companies and trade unions).

The survey also reviews the organisation approaches in their upskilling programs: that can be 1) Build internally (Internal trainings); 2) Buy on the market The most critical challenge is to understand which are the current and future needs; 3) Partnerships; through collaboration with different stakeholders.

There are also alternative ways to upskill the workforce, creating consortia, leveraging on freelance and/or crowdsource to really focus on talents.

In the upskilling programs we need to involve different stakeholders:

- **The workforce, considering their different expectations.**
- **Executives should be the main sponsors of the initiatives.**
- **HR could have budget constraints or difficulties in measuring the upskilling return on investment (ROI).**
- **Our project research has shown that trade unions and worker representatives are not always involved as they should in the design phase of training programs, resulting in a lower acceptance of some of the initiatives designed by the companies.**

To develop a successful program, it is key to involve all stakeholders from the start and understand their expectations and needs, as well as the external partners.

This allowed the steering group to perform a selection considering the factor of industrial and collective bargaining.

Deep Dive on Digital Upskilling Best Practices to increase gender diversity in the telecom workforce

Key building blocks (drivers) of an effective gender upskilling strategy:

- **Review HR processes:** remove bias in HR processes such as: recruiting, performance management and pay.
- **Share expertise:** activate mentorship programs with mentors both men and women and include this goal in their performance management process.
- **Reinforce networking:** promote women as role-models and professional networking groups internal and external to the Company.
- **Build the future:** define a target of % women in succession planning for creative and innovative ICT roles.
- **Make accessible:** require a high number, such as 50% of female participants in development/innovative/talent program.
- **Back-to-work facilitation:** propose technical upskilling/updating with flexible format aimed to women after a long period out of work (e.g., maternity leave)
- **Make women feel welcome:** adapt physical office environments and build consistent flexible work policies (non-discriminatory)

The round table then progressed to examine the five best practices identified for the digital upskilling to increase gender diversity. Presentations were made by:

- **Torkild Holmboe-Hay**, Consultant at the Danish trade union 3F, who presented on the Hilfr Collective Agreement Online Platform.
- **Kathryn Cullen**, Programme Director at Technology Ireland Software Skillnet, who presented on their Women Reboot's program.
- **Armand Leblois**, Regional Manager Corporate Affairs Europe North, South UK, and Ireland, who presented on Cisco's Network Academy.
- **Aniela Unguresan**, co-founder of the EDGE Certified Foundation, and Samira Tavares Kruth Verdade, Quality & Methodology Coordinator, Operations- Quality & Certifications, Capgemini Brazil, who led a joint presentation on Capgemini: Young Women in Tech Program.
- **Vidya Krishnan**, Chief Learning Officer & Global Head of Learning & Development, who presented on Ericsson: Design Your Future Program.

Overall, **digital upskilling and diversity change should be seen as a journey of transformation** and be part of the business strategy.

To prevent market shortages, social partners could tap into the vast reservoir of experience and talent available. They could do so by nurturing professional and technical skills to promote gender diversity in their organisation, which could integrate the concept of Digital empowerment, intrapreneur (internal mobility, learning culture, engagement) and develop multi-stakeholders' partnership with education systems, authorities, social partners and civil society.

Deep Dive on Digital Upskilling Best Practices to increase the employability of the ageing workforce in the Telecom sector

The aim of the roundtable was to discuss the best practices identified so far during the project, to increase the employability of the aging workforce in the European telecom sector and to facilitate a discussion around ageism in the workplace by addressing:

- **Flexibility:** allowing for flexible work and phased retirement.
- **Skillset:** prioritising older skills in hiring and promoting talent.
- **Job roles:** creating new positions or adapting older ones, allowing for new employment models.
- **Ergonomics:** changing workplace ergonomics to support all ages and their specific needs.

The round table then progressed to examine the best practices identified for the digital upskilling to support the employability of the ageing workforce. Presentations were made by:

- **Javier Miranda** representing DigitalES, who presented an upskilling program designed for ICT supporting the professional qualifications requirements and 5G specialisation.
- **Andrea Rubera** from TIM, who shared an overview of the Longevity Program developed to support the ongoing skills development of its aging workforce.
- **Annita Fjuk**, explaining Digital Norway's approach to upskilling for the Digidel program at the Norwegian Ministry of Modernisation.
- **Alessandro Cortesi** who presented Mercer's best practices and case study examples of implementing Reverse Mentoring as a means to support age diversity and upskilling.

Legal constraints can drive organisations to review learning programs and focus on the life-long learning journey. Collaboration between social partners should be extended to the design of holistic upskilling programs focussed on training on new technologies that include agility, creativity, and a variety of course duration (short burst of activity as well as longer courses).

It was noted that "Reverse mentoring" creates a win-win situation encouraging interactions across generations.

The paradox of digital upskilling for the ageing workforce

As previously outlined, the company survey demonstrated that the companies from the telecom sector were designing general digital upskilling programs but did not tailor them for the specific needs of the 50 years plus employees. The steering group decided to dedicate a panel exchange on the issue to understand how to tap this resource and promote ageing workforce employability.

[Tina Weber - Eurofound] Scouting the market, Eurofound has identified a lot of projects which are strictly linked to digitalization, but just few projects link digitalisation with age. Looking at European data, there is a huge difference in terms of skill levels between men and women, but also between different age groups, especially in some countries. In Europe people with upper levels of education are likely to remain employed into higher ages. According to the pillar of social rights, an environment which helps people stay employed is a fundamental aspect of an inclusive workplace.

In terms of training, organisations are less willing to pay for upskilling for employees above 60 years of age. In general, these people achieve fewer training opportunities. To change this situation, social partners are trying to implement specific actions to support long-life learning. Receiving effective upskilling is crucial also in terms of rewards: according to CEDEFOP, people with strong IT technical skills can achieve higher salaries (+3.7%). In general, the market is looking for higher technical skills.

[Rik Bleeker - Cisco] Cisco launched its own academy in 2019 and it is continuously launching broad programs for upskilling people all around the world.

The main trends connected to companies' digital transformation are software-based, connection, big-data, automation, and security. It means that all the people should increase their capabilities on technical / digital skills.

Cisco is also partnering with Randstad to provide training to unemployed people and delivering ICT related courses. Thanks to their partnerships and network academy they are delivering courses to +300k people.

[Tatjana Babrauskiene - European Economic and Social Committee]. Looking at the situation from a social perspective, we can see that there is a clear correlation between % GDP and amount of training. The lower is the GDP in a country, the less is the training offered. Policy makers and stakeholders should build more inclusive policies towards digital upskilling, involving all actors.

The COVID situation didn't help the environment, as it exposed structural weaknesses in the education and training social systems. As an example, 25% of all informal learning disappeared with employees working from home. At the same time, digitalisation is accelerating (increasing the obsolescence rate of existing skills) and new jobs seems to have a general lack of quality. To face this challenge large investments are really needed. The European Skills Agenda sets challenging targets, but the financial investment has been already set by the EU. So, the problem is more related to planning and taking effective actions.

For us, the co-operation is key for a transformative and inclusive recovery. Due to COVID and the war in Ukraine, the collaboration among different countries increased considerably in the last year. In any case, policy makers and stakeholders should build more inclusive policies towards digital upskilling.

A workshop on the Key obstacles to upskilling:

- ✓ **Time and budget** identified as major roadblocks for upskilling campaigns.
- ✓ **Skill Gaps identification:** Majority of companies are still in the planning phase regarding upskilling and find it difficult to identify skill gaps quantitatively. Technology tools can help with this by identifying skills that are rising and declining, as well as by considering the overlapping skills of various positions. These tools also support with diversity efforts.
- ✓ **Difficulty:** long planning time to cater to different needs and the diversity of the population.
- ✓ **Workers' representatives and trade unions need to be more involved** from the start/in the design phase; otherwise, it is difficult finding motivation and support for these initiatives.

A workshop on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can be used to show the results from multiple perspectives. This will help creating the "business case" and budget process. For KPIs to be meaningful, they should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) and consider both leading and lagging perspectives.

The Expansion of the digital upskilling best practices to other diversity groups

A focus on Ethnicity & refugees

We already have several programs but now we should change our approach from reactivity to proactivity, especially for a refugees' program.

We shouldn't just measure how many people are we training, but also – in concrete numbers - how many people are able to get a job after our training intervention

Best practices around ethnicity included:

- Mandatory immersive race awareness training, planning, and also a dedicated leadership event.
- Improved recruiting process, enhancing number of ethnic minority candidates in the selection pipeline.
- Reverse mentoring program, aimed at facilitating exchanges between different cultures.
- Ad-hoc dashboard to monitor diversity & inclusion data, including ethnicity pay gap analysis.

Best practices around integrating refugees to the workforce included:

- Virtual classrooms to focus on requested technical skills or supporting education programs.
- Mentorship programs to support colleagues in the onboarding.
- Training courses to enhance English capabilities to reduce language barriers.
- Onboarding on general digital concepts to refresh outdated skills.

A focus on Disability & Neurodiversity.

[Sara Sadarangani] brought the perspective of Unicus, a consulting company that offers high quality IT services within software development, testing, quality assurance and data science. All their consultants have Aspergers, which strengthens their abilities to make them the perfect match for software development, testing and data science.

When it comes to TIM, the company is promoting several initiatives to support people, by managing a program aimed at people with dyslexia and deploying digital solutions to enhance their productivity. In Italy, dyslexia is not included as a protected category.

Best practices around disability included:

- Ad-hoc reverse-mentoring programs, to directly involve disabled colleagues.
- Improved recruiting portal / process, with augmented communication features.
- Training and webinars to enhance general awareness on disabilities, reducing bias.
- Technical training to prepare disabled colleagues for technical roles.

A focus on the LGBTQ+ community

During the conference, a best practice for upskilling people from the LGBTQ+ community was identified in Hungary, LGBTQ+ Inclusive Benefits and support during transition (flexible work). It was also noted that employees transitioning prefer to smart work/ remote work during transition.

An invitation was shared to the participants to attend the LGBTQ+ Pride for Telco (virtual pride that grew during covid and expanded to include Ericsson, Nokia and Telenor).

Equity – the key to Expand of the digital upskilling to all

Across the panels it was concluded that there are strong common interests in focusing on the strengths of diversity and difference. The telecom sector needs to reflect on communities and the small adjustments needed to integrate a diverse workforce which are negligible compared to the added value of diversity, equity, and inclusion of diverse talents in the ICT workforce.

In conclusion of the Project.

The project has focussed on identifying successful digital upskilling pathways for women and aging workers, with the intention of adapting these solutions to include more diversity groups in the future, ensuring a truly Digital Upskilling for All.

The Digital Upskilling for All! project is a steppingstone to develop and scale more inclusive pathways for underrepresented groups while helping to create a truly diverse workforce across the whole European Telecoms sector.

ETNO and UNI Europa are also committed to promoting digital skills through their membership of the Digital Skills & Jobs Coalition (joined by both organisations on 21st February 2018) and the new Pact for Skills. The overall objective of the “Digital Upskilling for All!” project is to use social dialogue to update and further develop these recommendations, declarations and commitments, creating a toolkit that gathers best practice examples and digital upskilling initiatives that can be promoted within the Telecoms sector and the broader ICT industry as a whole.



with the Financial Support
of the European Commission



with the Financial Support
of the European Commission