

Digital skills and entrepreneurial attitudes to remedy the post-CODIV-19 labour market

The COVID-19 pandemic remodelled the labour market across Europe. In its [Input for the EU Recovery Roadmap / Action Plan](#), EUROCHAMBRES underlined that new approaches are needed to accelerate the provision of rights skills that businesses now demand. However, to rightly address the current labour market needs, vocational training, entrepreneurial education, and digital skills have to be included in the recovery strategy.

We invited the co-chairs of our Skills and Entrepreneurship Committee, the President of the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Aigars Rostovskis and the Vice President of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, Martha Schultz to present their and their organisation's view on the European economic recovery after COVID-19. Ambitious goals, concrete references to boost digitalisation in all sectors and a comprehensive strategy that mobilises all member states will be needed to boost the industry.

1. In your opinion, what should be the priorities to overcome the COVID-19?

Schultz: As soon as the situation allows, we must focus on the reconstruction of our economies. The current crisis hit all sectors of the economy at different levels and in various ways. Therefore, the methods of tackling the crisis have to be tailored to respective industries and companies. However, it is explicit that skills are an essential pillar of the recovery, as stated in the input of EUROCHAMBRES for the EU Recovery Roadmap. A post-COVID-19 economy will rely on skilled workers more than ever before. Reliable basic education, high quality, responsive vocational education training and higher education systems are cornerstones for a productive economy. A critical focus should be given to the potential of digital learning and strengthening adult learning.

2. How will the skills demand change after the COVID-19 crisis?

Schultz: The fact that companies are affected differently by the crisis indicates that there is also a need for different skills. However, it can be anticipated that the trend towards higher-level skills will accelerate. Digital skills will become a considerable part of it. We must, however, be aware, that digital skills cannot substitute for the traditional skills, which are fundamental for getting employed in any business. Sound hands-on and technical skills in a certain field will remain the foundation for the majority of jobs. These skills, though, need to be complemented by the ability to apply them in a work environment, which is increasingly relying on digital tools and processes.

3. What type of measures do you think will yield the best results?

Rostovskis: Tailoring and front-loading financial programmes to contribute to recovery-related activities. The EU should boost the emergence of major industrial projects that create jobs, through a clear investment focus on innovation and research, enhanced cross-border cooperation and public-private partnerships in science-intensive industries. In the longer run – EU must be able to absorb new ideas and new companies as much as possible to maintain entrepreneurial spirit so that we can offer solutions for future challenges.

4. Regarding the skills and entrepreneurship policies, which areas should we focus on?

Rostovskis: We should make learning more accessible, so there are opportunities for as many people as possible to learn new skills, both for the unemployed and for those who want to expand their knowledge. Lifelong learning should be the EU's and national governments' focus. These are times for new business development – the virus is changing economies, business and consumers habits. What makes it an excellent opportunity for entrepreneurship mindset to rise and explore plenty of new possibilities.

5. Could you go a bit more into detail on our input to the Recovery Plan?

Schultz: After the corona crisis, we think the focus should be on a quick recovery of the economy. In terms of training and education, digital skills will be required more than ever, meaning that there will also be a need for more robust investments in digital tools and digital skills at all educational levels. At this very moment all over Europe, educational technologies are being used respectively, which brings a high demand for virtual learning platforms, networks, advanced digital infrastructure, digital innovation hubs, etc. After the crisis introduction of digital modules, e.g. in vocational education and apprenticeships, ways of working and learning at home will be state-of-the-art. Still, unfortunately, tools are not yet ready for it, and a lot can be done to move things further. Upskilling for the post-crisis, with a particular focus on the digitalisation aspect, will be one of the biggest challenges and one of the most significant needs at the same time. To achieve this, digital innovation hubs and centres and other institutions with digital know-how should also play an essential role in sharing and disseminating tools and experiences.

6. What should be the role of chambers of commerce in this regard?

Rostovskis: Chambers should encourage and prove the need for businesses in all sectors to participate in the development of digital learning materials, platforms and training, providing practical experience. Bringing the learning process forward and closer to the industry makes it more likely to provide a workforce in the future. The more precisely education meets the needs of the labour market, and the more prosperous the economy will get.

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