

“Fostering workplace innovation” in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

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The European Commissioners, December 2019

In 2020 the European Commission (EC) started a public consultation on the European Pillar of Social Rights, launched in 2017. EUWIN’s 13 partners submitted an opinion paper arguing that workplace innovation offers a comprehensive approach to creating the fair working conditions mentioned in the Pillar, simultaneously with organisational performance including productivity and innovation capability. Additionally the partners made several pledges to take concrete actions to implement the Pillar ([click for EUWIN Opinion Paper](#)). In the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan published in March 2021, the need to foster workplace innovation was mentioned twice.

‘Workplace innovation’ was adopted by the EC in October 2012 as one of the objectives in the EU2020 Strategy. The EC funded the European Workplace Innovation Network (EUWIN) from 2013 to 2017. The concept of workplace innovation integrates aspects of diverse policy-related agendas including innovation, digitisation, productivity, job quality, lifelong learning, wellbeing at work, skills and social dialogue.

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Chapter 2 of the *European Pillar of Social Rights* ('Fair Working Conditions') defines several key principles, the realisation of which in practice will be substantially enhanced by workplace innovation:

- Key Principle 5:
 - "Innovative forms of work that ensure quality working conditions shall be fostered."
- Key Principle 8:
 - "Social dialogue and involvement of workers"
- Key Principle 10:
 - "Workers have the right to a high level of protection of their health and safety at work."
 - "Workers have the right to a working environment adapted to their professional needs and which enables them to prolong their participation in the labour market."

In the Commission Staff Working Document in which all contributions to the consultation are discussed, the EUWIN opinion paper has only been mentioned. Issues of social dialogue, work organisation, health & safety, skills and innovation are discussed. But unfortunately, it has not been recognised by the commission staff that workplace innovation tackles these issues integrally ([click for Staff Document](#)).

Fortunately the concept of workplace innovation is mentioned twice in the Action Plan itself, in the chapter 'More and Better Jobs':

"Social dialogue, information, consultation and participation of workers and their representatives at different levels (including company and sectoral level) play an important role in shaping economic transitions and fostering workplace innovation, in particular with a view to the ongoing twin transitions and the changes in the world of work" (p. 16). Twin refers to green and digital.

"The Commission encourages national authorities and social partners to ensure the information and consultation of workers during restructuring processes as required by EU rules and to promote the participation of workers at company level with a view to fostering workplace innovation" (p. 18). ([click for Action Plan](#))

Well, the EC apparently does not see a major role regarding workplace innovation for itself in this Action Plan. Encouraging others to foster workplace innovation is not very much of an action. However, we can consider ourselves fortunate that the concept of workplace innovation has survived and can be referred to at EU level as well as in European countries. Furthermore it is on the research agenda of DG RTD and in support programmes such as 'Workplace innovation uptake by SMEs' of the EU Executive Agency for SMEs.

Our mission to get workplace innovation more explicitly on the agenda is being continued.

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