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In Italian SMEs, elderly and poorly trained workers

The majority of Italian SMEs do little training, not very targeted and only if it is compulsory. This is what emerges from the latest INAPP survey

Although it is now a well-known fact that training represents a **driving force for company growth and competitiveness**, Italian companies (especially the smaller ones) still do not organize training courses for their employees. This is the photograph that emerges from the Indaco Imprese survey led by **INAPP** (National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies) **on the state of training in companies**, which involved over 20 thousand companies.

Data on training in European companies

The INAPP survey starts from the analysis of the impact of the Covid emergency on the continuous training of European companies.

The data confirm that, at a European level, the pandemic has caused a **significant reduction in the average rate of participation in company training programmes**: in fact, it went from 10.8% in 2019 to 9.2% in 2020, but the impact was stronger in developing countries. In Italy, for example, the rate of participation in training fell to 7.2% in 2020 (-0.9% compared to 2019), returning to the values of 2015.

Only in 2021 did the trend return to an upward trend, with the European average settling at 10.8% and the Italian one at 9.9%.

Data on training in Italian companies

The survey then focused on the situation of Italian companies, confirming a **lack of structured training especially in micro-enterprises**: only 56.7% organize training courses for their employees. A significantly lower percentage than the 94.1% recorded for large companies.

Therefore, a large part of SMEs is not aware of the advantages produced by a regular and systematic investment in continuous training and considers it exclusively a regulatory compliance.

As regards the **thematic areas**, in fact, 84.5% of the courses offered by micro-enterprises is linked to a legal obligation. Only 32.5% of companies provide training courses on technical specifications and production/service technologies.

Companies often involve only a part of the staff in the courses, neglecting **low-skilled workers**, who would instead have greater need for skills updating and development.

Italian companies also find it difficult to seize the opportunities linked to the **funds available for training**: 81.5% of companies have never heard of the Fund for new skills (FNC), 13% have chosen not to use it and only 4.8% of companies have decided to present a training project financed by the Fund.

At the same time, the old age dependency ratio, i.e. the ratio between the population of at least 65 years of age and the population of working age (15-64 years of age) remains among the highest in Europe in Italy (37%). This means that the workers are getting older and with them also the internal skills of the companies.

Opportunities for companies

The impact of the pandemic has prompted new reflections on economic recovery, reconstruction and resilience-building for SMEs in Europe.

Businesses are now called upon to compete in the digital age, in which, due to the deep **technological transformations** of production processes and due to the appearance of new goods and new services as well as new competitors, support programs for training, reskilling and upskilling of all personnel are needed, also and above all in SMEs.

One of the first actions taken during the emergency period was the initiative launched by the European Commission in April 2020 (Recovery Fund), with a particular focus on training, including the training of workers at risk of job loss.

Subsequently, the European Commission launched a new **Digital Education Action Plan**, inviting Member States to build on the experience of the emergency to develop more digitally oriented training.

"The European Year of Skills, inaugurated in May by the European Commission and coordinated in Italy by our Institute - explains Sebastiano Fadda, president of INAPP - can support the development of workers' skills, in particular through three guidelines: by **promoting investments in training and requalification**; ensuring that **workers' skills are consistent with the needs of the labor market**; ensuring the correspondence between **citizens' aspirations and skills** with the opportunities offered by the labor market, in particular in the sectors involved in the green and digital transitions and committed to the economic recovery".