



## **FITS Project welcome speech**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you here today on behalf of ETNO, UNI Europa, and the Steering Group of the project entitled 'Filling the ICT skills gap in the Telecommunications sector of the future', known as 'FITS'.

For those of you who are not familiar with ETNO or UNI Europa, allow me to briefly introduce our two organisations.

Since 1992, ETNO has been the voice of European telecommunications network operators representing 35 pan-European companies active in 41 countries of the EU and beyond. ETNO members employ about one million people that collectively account for a turnover of more than € 270 billion.

UNI Europa federates over 320 affiliated trade unions organisations in 50 countries, representing about 7 million workers in key services including telecoms.

Let me start by saying that, as an Association, we made an effort this to strongly push for a wider narrative and vision of where Europe should go.

We presented, with our Agenda for Europe, which you will find on our website, a concrete set of proposals on how to make Europe a real digital continent. In this vision we decided to take the viewpoint of citizens. I want to be clear and to underline that: **citizens, not only consumers.**

The reason for this is that we believe that citizenship is a much more wide-ranging concept, one that includes also aspects of life like work.

We believe that, when designing policies in any field, we should all be inspired by the idea that citizens are consumers, are fathers, mothers and that they are **workers.**

For this reason, I am happy to introduce this workshop today, because it is about skills and because it takes the viewpoint of workers, employees, of all of us, as we are faced by huge opportunities and huge challenges in today's fast moving ICT sector.

This project is a further illustration of the work of the The Health and Safety Working Group of the EU Social Dialogue Committee for telecoms of which ETNO and UNI Europa are the main partners. ETNO and UNI Europa have already developed together a series of codes of conduct or guidelines for instance on teleworking, on working conditions in call centres, on the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders, the promotion of diversity at work and The Good Work, Good Health project on mental wellbeing. The output from this latest project, FITS, is yet another example of voluntary guidance and good practice testimony.

Let me highlight that today's conference is the culminating point of a project which could not have taken place without the support of the European Commission whom I would like to thank. We are very proud as representatives of the EU telecommunications sector to have been chosen for carrying out this project.

The Telecommunications sector is an important part of the economy of the European Union representing some 2.2% of GDP and employing directly more than 1 million people. The pace of change in the sector over the past 25 years is probably unparalleled. Technological and market shifts such as those from copper to fibre, from fixed line to mobile and from voice to data traffic have transformed the nature of the work undertaken by many. Technological innovation and consumer demand within the telecommunications sector will continue to drive this pace of change for the foreseeable future.

This project, first set out to analyse information on telecommunications and ICT Labour market trends, second to identify the main drivers of change and their impact on skills needs in the telecommunication sector. Third, to identify and promote best practices on effective solutions to fill the ICT Skills gap, and review the future skills needs of the industry.

In particular, the project aims were to provide information for the European telecoms industry and its partners, such as training providers, and education establishments, and to share best practice for training and recruiting competent talent for the future, attracting more women into ICT employment and reskilling an existing workforce, particularly those over 40 years of age.

The results of this project being presented today result from a study carried out by the consultants from Breyer Publico.

The study contains research conducted through stakeholder interviews that focused upon understanding main business trends, industry future skills needs and current good practice in addressing skills development challenges.

The study recognises that the European telecommunications industry is fiercely competitive and reveals the business changes that are taking the industry from a historically hardware based environment to a software dominated digital future. What is more important, the study puts employees at its centre. This is why it proposes the skills and training that are crucial for the telecom industry to address within ever-present technology advances. It also highlights current good practice as examples of solutions to identify, recruit and retain highly skilled staff.

The study utilises twenty-seven skill topics that are critical to the future of the telecoms industry and of all people who are currently employed by the Companies I represent. The study then culminated in proposing five key recommendations to address the unrelenting requirement to maintain and further develop a highly skilled workforce.

Finally I would like to thank all the companies involved in this project, for their many interesting contributions and many of them are represented here today. I look forward to an interesting debate and I wish all of you a very enjoyable workshop.