



Consultation on the Update for the Skills Agenda for Europe

SOCIAL PARTNER REPLY
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Eurocadres
Boulevard du Roi Albert II, 5
B-1210 Bruxelles

The Commission has invited the Social Partners to submit written answers to the consultations aiming at updating the Skills Agenda for Europe. Eurocadres is a cross-sectoral European trade union representing nearly six million professionals and managers in Europe. We want to ensure that the voices of highly skilled workers are also taken into consideration in the update. An update of the Skills Agenda is extremely important and timely. Everything involving competences, creativity and innovations are essential for improving employment and competitiveness at the EU level.

1. Do you agree with the challenges presented?

The Commission presents several challenges in the background paper, which are important to tackle. However, the paper is not differentiating among different groups on the labour market (e.g. unemployed, self-employed, young, women, old, high qualified, low qualified, etc.). This should be emphasised as different groups need different and tailored approaches. We would especially like to stress the importance of upskilling lower skilled/unqualified workers as well as unemployed persons, however, without forgetting that highly educated and qualified workers also need skill updates. Furthermore, the issue of brain drain is highly affecting specific sectors and geographical regions, and this should also be tackled in the updated Skills Agenda.

In terms of lifelong learning, meeting the goals requires that the demand for education and training be reinforced through, for example, new funding systems, quality training as well as access to training. It also calls for the development of new types of models, in particular, for



combining formal education with on-the-job learning and for developing the entire working life.

2. In which ways can Social Partners concretely support the update of the Skills Agenda and modernisation of VET?

We very much support that skills are a collective responsibility, as is stated in the document. Information is the first step so that workers will use their rights to education and training. For the lower skilled, additional assistance (incentives) are needed, as they currently use existing possibilities less than others. Collective bargaining in (large) companies or branch-level is an efficient way to ensure lifelong learning and the adequacy of skills and competences.

E-learning has gained in importance in recent years and e-learning tools are increasingly important in Europe and need to be jointly evaluated by the social partners.

[Empowering workers to up/reskill]

3. What new action could be taken to empower workers to up/reskill, taking an inclusive approach?

Especially for the lower skilled workers, training during working hours is of utmost importance. In addition, those who have internet access have automatically a better access to training. Therefore, access to ICT should be improved for everyone.

The right to training must be guaranteed to the employee and not left to the employer's sole initiative. It must also be extended to all members of the working community, whatever their status and whatever the size of the company, in order to guarantee quality and respect the rules in carrying out the activity. Education is a right for employees, and employers must be flexible and willing to reorganise work so that employees can attend training. It is important to create tools and services, but it could prove useless if we do not create the conditions and opportunities to access those tools and services. It is important to remember that the right to training should not be an individual responsibility, time and financial support needs to be organised for those participating in training.

We also welcome the efforts from the Commission side to look into individual learning accounts and other already existing financial instruments that aim to increase adult learning. In all of this, quality training and access to training as well as guidance needs to be stressed. Also, the recognition of qualifications should not be forgotten.

Successful employment calls for a wide range of career track services for those active in working life. It is particularly important to develop effective models/products for



competence development that are suitable for different stages of working life and for various categories of workers. In this way, both the worker and the employer get an added value. The adult population must be provided with skills that ensure their ability to become employed in case their current job or an entire field or industry disappears from the market. Skills required by digitalisation and the greening of the economy must be taken into consideration within all EU policy sectors. Technical and/or digital skills are just one narrow – although indispensable – part of the various skills and qualifications required to advance digitalisation. Equally important in contributing or adapting to the digital revolution are those skills that facilitate community-based learning and problem-solving across the different fields of education, disciplines and industries. The development of digital skills calls for extensive investments in the continued education of teachers at all levels.

Too many seniors leave the job market without passing on their skills. The organisation of working time at the end of a career and progressive pre-retirement can be a means of ensuring this transmission of knowledge.

4. How further progress can be made in the area of validation of skills?

In order to motivate the individual coherence is needed between individual responsibility and individual rights (e.g. pay, time, social security during training). Professional training should also give access to a diploma which could be recognised and used in other firms either of the same branch or, if it concerns transversal competences, in other industries.

Inter-European recognition of diplomas and qualifications should be intensified. Especially for professional qualifications /certificates, this is not the case. For example, someone with a qualification in metal working in France is not necessarily recognised in Germany. The transition between learning and working should be smoothed.

What comes to improvements in higher education, the integration of work experience or internships into university degree programmes must be implemented in a sensible manner. Rather than mechanically combining work and studies, it is essential to provide flexible opportunities to integrate work and studies in a balanced way. Support must be provided for those institutions of higher education that wish to grant ECTS points for voluntary work and non-profit activities as well. Education and training must always bring added value to competence. Within higher education, this means reflection and integration with theory.



[Addressing skills mismatches]

5. **Do you consider the Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills and the Platforms for Centres of Vocational Excellence as a good basis for further work to break silos between different skills stakeholders?**

No opinion.

6. **What do you think should be the future priorities regarding skills intelligence?**

For us to better understand the world in which we live, and to face machine-learning technologies and the challenges of the future, training and education should also focus on humanities, not only on vocational and professional training. For professionals and managers, managerial and human skills are important. It is of utmost importance to on top of technological skills also increase transversal skills, that provide incentives for critical thinking and interpersonal skills.

Digitalisation and the greening of the economy are deeply changing organisations and ways of working. Training must be able to provide support for professionals and managers in order to approach their roles in managing teams, organising working process and transferring competences.

Depending on the type of digital tools introduced, employees will need to have a skill set that combines specific technical and sectoral skills, as well as a range of transversal and non-technical skills; such as problem-solving ability, critical thinking, collaboration and communication skills, co-creation, creativity and an entrepreneurial and ethical mindset. At the same time, human and social skills and competences, such as people management, emotional intelligence and judgement, need to be developed and strengthened.

7. **What new action could be taken to address skills mismatches?**

The key challenge is to ensure the right match between the skills of the workforce and the needs of a changing economy to enable everyone to have a good job and to take full advantage of the digital and green economy transformation. The capacity for innovation, the level of productivity, living and working conditions, the interest and meaning of work, and the level of commitment of workers to their activity are closely dependent on this.

Portable rights are a good initiative, but often, when people change enterprises, they are transformed into money. Training should be an obligation for everyone in an employment relationship.



Exchanges of workers between companies (for example a traineeship in customer enterprises for better understanding of their needs) could also be an option to increase skills. Training courses should also include more practical work.

[Strengthening collective leadership]

8. Which action could help to increase social partners' engagement in workforce skills development in general?

Social partners need to stress the general responsibility of all workers in all stages of life. We want to stress that skills development should be a right for everyone with tailored needs for different groups (e.g. unemployed, self-employees, young, women, old, high qualified, low qualified, etc.).

In this respect, it is probable that legal provisions or the application of sanctions are necessary to incentivise employers to negotiate. Collective bargaining on skills development plans should be strongly encouraged.

9. How could social partners collaborate among themselves and with national governments to ensure more and better investment in the up/reskilling of the workforce?

Social partners can play a role in supporting enterprises in their efforts to set up skills plans to adapt to current and future changes. The support-needs of SMEs should be taken into account.

Member States, social partners and education and training providers should work together to develop national strategies to ensure that digital and STEM competences are taught at all levels, from basic to advanced, according to sectoral and industrial needs, and to all low, medium and high-skilled workers. Also, the lack of women studying and working in STEM sectors should be tackled specifically.

The acquisition of new skills and competences is necessary to keep up with technological developments and to be able to carry out one's job in the new professional environment. It is important that access to training is a *right*, not a favour to the employee. We must set mandatory and sufficient training rights for workers, enabling them to maintain and improve their working situation. It is a question of:

- integrating into negotiations with employers the upskilling and reskilling of the existing workforce to adapt to the rapid pace of technological change on working time.



- supporting the use of standards to increase training and certification not related to a supplier or employer.
- negotiating learning and e-learning conditions that are favourable to workers, namely with effective, measurable and certified results.

[Modernising Vocational Education and Training]

10. What are the key priorities in the field of VET for attention in the coming years to address the challenges of achieving social fairness, a carbon-neutral economy and digital transition?

VET is an important part of the educational chain: co-operation between the DGs (Employment & Education) is crucial. It should provide the skills and competencies for further education, from to tertiary to life-long learning. In the consultation, VET is seen as the most effective tool to provide skills and qualifications that are relevant for the labour market. We would like to see a stronger link between VET and higher education. This involves closer co-operation between VET and higher education as well as promoting higher VET. The need for higher skills is increasing very fast. This may well cause that many employees will need to get a new and higher qualification during their working careers.
