



# **Beyond the European Year of Skills**

## **Maintaining the Momentum**

### National coordinators' closing statement on the European Year of Skills

1. European labour markets are facing major labour and skills shortages. The green and digital transitions, combined with demographic changes<sup>1</sup>, are increasing demand for skilled workers even further. We see many challenges in this rapidly changing environment, but also a historic impetus to upskill and reskill, to boost lifelong learning, to empower people and businesses, and to support innovation and competitiveness.
2. Upskilling and reskilling policies open up new possibilities for people to engage fully with society, for businesses to address labour shortages and for the European economy to become both more competitive and more inclusive. Our entire economy and our society are based on skills. Skills are our most valuable resource and they should be leveraged as a strategic asset for a successful future.
3. Since 9 May 2023, the European Year of Skills has raised awareness of the importance of skills and highlighted the thousands of initiatives within Member States through its bottom-up approach. Through the network of national coordinators, collaboration and dialogue between Member States have been strengthened, creating a culture of peer learning between all stakeholders involved. It has also provided a platform to engage in skills promotion and development, also beyond the European Union. As national coordinators, we very much appreciated the fact that skills were being promoted at European level. This

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<sup>1</sup> An ageing workforce will gradually leave a large number of vacancies to be filled. This development will lead to an increase in the need for manpower and skills in many sectors, including the care sector.

has helped us to mobilise and strengthen the dynamics at work in our countries and regions.

4. Skills are a cornerstone of the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>2</sup>, particularly when it comes to championing the right to education, training and lifelong learning. Investing in upskilling and reskilling must therefore be a consistent and continuous priority, even after the European Year of Skills has come to an end, while keeping in mind the Porto headline target of 60% of adults participating in training every year. This issue has been further highlighted in the Commission's Action Plan on skills and labour shortages in the EU<sup>3</sup>, where the provision of skills, training and education is one of the key areas for action at EU, Member State, regional and social partner levels.
5. Within the framework of the mandate given to them, and following numerous exchanges throughout the European Year of Skills, the group of national coordinators would like to reconfirm the priorities identified by the Council – investment, skills relevance, matching aspirations, attracting third country talent – and place, in line with these, particular emphasis on the following areas of action:
  - ✓ **Implementing skills in all policies:** while skills are obviously at the heart of employment, education and training policies, they are also a key element of our industrial, innovation, health, environmental and other transition policies. These policies will not succeed without taking skills into account. In addition, tackling the skills gap and facilitating the mobility of workers and learners are prerequisites for an effective Single Market. Finally, skills are an essential means of ensuring equitable transitions, with opportunities for all, so that no one is left behind.
  - ✓ **Investing in a broad learning culture:** a culture in which everyone continues to learn and develop will contribute to the success of skills updating and a robust labour market that can enable current and future transitions. In order to promote a broad learning culture, it is essential to create a favourable environment and conditions (availability and transparency of information, time and financial resources, strategic workforce planning, social dialogue, flexible learning pathways, tailor-made measures, effective guidance, self-confidence and motivation) that encourage people to engage in education or training (including basic training). Facilitating access to learning opportunities implies a shared responsibility for governments, public employment services, employers and employees, social partners, education and training providers...

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<sup>2</sup> The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan was published by the European Commission on 4 March 2021. The EU headline targets it contains were welcomed by the European Council in its conclusions of 24-25 June 2021.

<sup>3</sup> COM (2024) 131. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Labour and skills shortages in the EU: an action plan.

- ✓ **Introducing formal, non-formal and informal learning into the workplace:** learning in the workplace is essential for both employees and organisations. It is a major factor of employee well-being and motivation, one of the most favoured means of learning and one of the strongest correlates of business performance<sup>4</sup>. We should therefore encourage practice-based learning, quality traineeships and apprenticeships, formal and non-formal learning in companies, but also put more emphasis on (certain aspects of) informal learning such as team activities, on-the-job mentoring, job rotation or self-study. Informal learning is an important feature of job quality and therefore deserves greater attention, including in the future policy and research agenda, alongside formal and non-formal learning.
- ✓ **Making skills count:** it is important to put skills at the centre and to continue raising awareness that all skills matter, regardless of the context in which they were acquired. Skills-first approaches to staff recruitment and training can help address skills shortages by expanding the potential talent pool, helping to reach disadvantaged groups and improving retention rates. Skills validation enables people to better understand and document the skills they have acquired throughout their professional career and helps them in their lifelong learning choices. It also gives workers access to better-paid jobs and better working conditions. It is therefore important to ensure that the outcomes of skills validation are more widely recognised in the labour market. From this point of view, to ensure a better match between skills developed by individuals and the jobs available, micro-credentials can also be an effective way of responding to labour market needs.
- ✓ **Matching skills sets to labour market needs:** in the context of the green, digital and demographic transitions, training, reskilling and upskilling are crucial to ensuring that workers, people currently out of employment and inactive people have access to quality jobs and that companies are able to recruit skilled workers. Skills needs change rapidly and therefore it is crucial that the training provision remains responsive and aligned with labour market needs. This requires not only adequate anticipation, i.e. through forecasting skills and changes in the labour market at macro, meso and micro level, and intelligent matching systems, but also additional efforts towards a common skills language and updated practice-oriented learning programmes in line with those needs.
- ✓ **Accelerating the dynamics of inclusive labour markets:** labour shortages, combined with the green, digital and demographic transitions, are creating a powerful dynamic for inclusive labour markets. We should enable everyone to develop the skills to seize new opportunities. Current labour shortages offer an opportunity to integrate vulnerable people and new talent into the labour market through upskilling and reskilling (basic and transversal skills, green and digital skills) and lifelong career guidance as well as appropriated tools and support. These opportunities can be seized to actively engage people and unlock the potential of underrepresented groups for the labour market. Employers, with the support of public employment services, should be

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/6207>

encouraged and incentivised to rethink their recruitment policy so as to open access to employment to these groups through adapted and integrated policies regarding guidance, job coaching and training. This should go hand in hand with continued efforts to promote diversity and gender equality by all stakeholders and at all levels.

6. The group of national coordinators firmly believes that **joint efforts of all actors**, including social partners, are necessary to harness synergies and take **efficient action**, drawing, whenever appropriate, on already existing national and European tools (e.g. the European Skills, Competences, and Occupations classification, the European Qualifications Framework, the European approach to micro-credentials), initiatives (e.g. Individual Learning Accounts), cooperation platforms and networks (e.g. Pact for Skills, Public Employment Services network, Centres of Vocational Excellence) as well as other types of agreements, bipartite or multipartite, at European, national, regional or even local level<sup>5</sup>.
7. At the end of the European Year of Skills and through the mandate they have been given, the national coordinators are inviting policy makers at all levels, European, national, regional or even local level, to **keep skills at the top of the policy agenda** as they are key to Europe's socio-economic future, its competitiveness and its capacity for innovation, in particular through the following actions:
  - a. Ensure that the dialogue on skills and the exchange of good practices supported by the European Year of Skills are maintained and strengthened within, between and in coordination with the Member States and other participating countries, and that the various skills-related policy agendas converge;
  - b. Take additional concrete measures in the field, wherever relevant, addressing the need for upskilling and reskilling and aimed in particular at companies and their workers, as well as at people currently out of employment and inactive people;
  - c. Involve the social partners in the development, implementation and evaluation of skills policies as social dialogue plays a key role in tackling labour and skills shortages;
  - d. Develop and strengthen links and collaboration between education and training providers, as well as labour market players in order to bridge the skills gap and better meet the needs of our economies, while at the same time guaranteeing inclusion and personal development;

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<sup>5</sup> Two of the latest examples, at European level, are the Barcelona Tripartite Joint Statement and the Val Duchesse Tripartite Declaration for a Thriving European Social Dialogue.

- e. Promote and support the integration of the skills dimension in the design and implementation of all policies, beyond employment, education and training policies.