



BARCELONA TRIPARTITE JOINT STATEMENT ON THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF SKILLS

The Decision (EU) 2023/936 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 on a European Year of Skills expresses the desire shared by the institutions of the European Union and of its Member States to further promote the crucial role of reskilling and upskilling as a priority of EU and national policy agendas with various goals: to improve access to quality and inclusive skills development, training and lifelong learning and help address skills shortages and gaps that undermine, in particular in SMEs, competitiveness, growth, employment and social cohesion. The European Year considers skills to constitute a driver of the just transition, innovation, competitiveness and social justice

Article 14 (1) of the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union** recognises that everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training. Moreover, Principles 1, 3, 4 and 5 of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** state that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning; equal treatment and opportunities regarding employment, social protection and education; active support to employment including support for job search, training and re-qualification; secure and adaptable employment, regardless of the type and duration of the labour relationship, so that workers have the right to fair and equal treatment regarding working conditions, access to social protection and training.

For its part, **the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan** stresses that increasing the participation of under-represented groups will contribute to a more inclusive employment growth. The targets proposed in the Action Plan, welcomed by the **Porto Declaration of 8 May 2021** and by the conclusions of the European Council of June 2021, are that by 2030 at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment and at least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year. Moreover, the **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan** introduced a new and ambitious sub-target for young people, namely reducing the rate of NEETs from 12.6% (2019) to 9% by 2030.

The **2020 European Skills Agenda** paved the way for increasing investment in people's skills by using all the tools and funds available and suggested actions to equip the workforce with the right skills to harness the digital and green transition, such as the 'Skills for Jobs' approach, a key element to make education and training programmes more relevant for the labour market and close the gap between education and employment. The '**Pact for Skills**' aims to support social partners, public and private organisations with upskilling and reskilling. So far, 1500 organisations have committed to upskill at least 10 million people.

The **Council Recommendations on Individual Learning Accounts and Micro-credentials** aim at fostering access, take-up and transparency of quality labour-market relevant training and the **Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience** also emphasises the important role that VET plays in preparing people for the labour market and in further developing their skills throughout working life.

The **Decision on a European Year of Skills** builds upon the Union's prolonged effort in this sphere: the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for adults aims to ensure that everyone in society has the basic skills (numeracy, literacy, and digital skills), knowledge, and competences to play an active part in society and progress on the labour market; the Council Recommendation A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee aims to ensure that all young people receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education; the Commission Recommendation for effective active support to employment following the Covid-19 crisis highlighted the need for a coherent set of active labour market policies; and the European Council in the “**New Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024**” stressed that progress towards a social Europe calls for a common commitment to the **United Nations 2030 Agenda**.

The **recent Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue** in the European Union calls on Member States to ensure an enabling environment for bipartite and tripartite social dialogue, including collective bargaining, promoting a fair and just transition towards climate neutrality, as well as fostering quality and labour market relevant training opportunities.

In this regard, **the European Green Deal** and the **Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality** emphasise that access to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning for all and quality jobs are essential to deliver on the green transition. Digital skills are high in demand. Improving skills for innovation is particularly essential, including for the industrial sectors. It is a priority to train a sufficient number of people with the right skills, in particular where the shortages are the highest, along with ensuring quality jobs and better working conditions. It is also a priority to make sure that the whole European workforce possesses basic digital skills, which are not only necessary to participate in the labour market but are also essential for quality of life and active ageing. The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030 set of the target that at least 80% of the EU population aged 16-74 has at least basic digital skills by 2030.

For their part, **the European social partners, in their work programme for 2022-2024**, have affirmed that, in the context of the green and digital transitions, training and reskilling are crucial for ensuring that workers have access to quality jobs and that companies are able to recruit qualified workers. This is why it is important to strengthen and improve social dialogue at all appropriate levels and to ensure effective access to training. The European social partners intend in particular to conduct a project on skills matching.

The shortage of qualified workers, due to demographic challenges, to structural changes, to digitalization and decarbonization, as well as to working conditions, and set in the context of the need to up-skill and re-skill a large proportion of the European workforce in response to the twin transitions, is a decisive factor affecting the EU. To address this issue, all actors should increase their efforts in the framework of their specific competences and responsibilities.

Ensuring for all workers, unemployed, inactive and young people not yet in the labour market equal access to opportunities for the acquisition of new skills must favour sustainable and inclusive growth and the creation of quality jobs. EU and national institutions, companies and workers and workers have a shared responsibility to foster a skilled workforce as a crucial factor for company's competitiveness and productivity. The availability of high-quality and accessible training and lifelong learning opportunities are also key factors to equip workers with the necessary skills to perform a variety of different evolving tasks and enter skilled occupations in changing circumstances. At the same time, their training should lead to greater opportunities for decent employment and better working conditions. This is why European and national trade unions of workers and employers' organisations need to be engaged by effective social dialogue and contribute to shape the skills strategies of the EU and EU Member States.

Efforts to upskill and reskill the workforce can only deliver improved employability outcomes if national education and training systems are reformed in parallel, involving the social partners, to ensure that learning programmes are continually updated in view of changing job requirements and skills needs. It is also important to improve the recognition of skills and qualifications at EU and national levels to support a better match between people's developing skills and available jobs.

Within the European Union, the Council, the Commission and the social partners have accumulated substantial shared experiences that underscore the importance of accessing quality jobs and developing skills and training, with the common objective of ensuring that European society achieves higher levels of economic development, cohesion and social justice. For all these reasons, we endorse this

BARCELONA TRIPARTITE JOINT STATEMENT

1. We applaud the Decision of the European Year of Skills adopted by the EU co-legislators and we express our readiness to contribute to its success and follow-up in the European Union and in all its Member States.

2. We agree to make efforts to ensure that the working age population are equipped with the necessary skills for labour market and companies, and in particular SMEs, have access to people with the skills that they need. To reach this objective, it is crucial ensuring quality, inclusive and effective trainings. This will favour the competitiveness of European companies, increase people's opportunities as well as motivation to up and re-skill, and promote decent employment and better working conditions. In combination with training provision, it is important that workers and working age people (including entrepreneurs) have access to quality career guidance, which will contribute to the better uptake of training and better labour market outcomes as well as fostering job transitions.

3. We commit to effective cooperation between the institutions and the social partners as tripartite social dialogue between governments and social partners, bipartite social dialogue, and dialogue with EU institutions are and must continue to be essential tools in the context of skills development and to adapt our countries to the rapidly changing demographic reality and engage in the necessary actions to improve skills development, matching and quality jobs across Europe.

Social dialogue is key for defining and implementing public policies aimed at supporting workers' skills development and at their professional training and reskilling, as well as for the governance of the training system, in the conviction that employers' organisations and trade unions are the best placed to identify the current and future needs of companies and workers and the labour market.

4. We agree that the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning, as set out in Principle 1 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, is essential to help all working, unemployed and inactive people of working-age to develop in their career and to improve their employment opportunities, as well as to achieve the European target of 60% of all adults participating in training every year by 2030. It is an important shared objective of governments and social partners to increase workers' access to trainings according to the terms established by national laws or agreed in collective agreements, taking into account national industrial relations and education and training practices. The role of the social partners, while respecting their autonomy, is crucial in securing employment, managing the green transition and a good working environment, which ensures workers' well-being in their work, motivates them, and enables them to progress in their career and earnings, and benefiting employers from the enhanced motivation and productivity of their workforce and overall businesses performance.

We will work to take the necessary steps to ensure that training can be exercised by everyone (including workers, job seekers, NEETs...) at national, sectoral, and local levels by effective support provided to people, such as financial incentives for employers and workers, paid educational leave, paid time off, training budget (through Individual Learning Accounts or related schemes), validation of their skills and access to quality guidance and counselling, taking into account national industrial relations and education and training practices.

5. We consider that quality initial and continuous education and training is key to enhance the employability of people all along their working life and to make our companies more competitive and resilient. Apprenticeships for adults needs to be developed, as this can be an effective way to ensure retraining and equip the workforce with the relevant and updated skills for new tasks and jobs in the just transition. Lifelong learning is the foundation of citizenship as it helps people to contemplate change and the future with hope rather than fear.

Training as a social foundation and the basis of employment is a cornerstone for increasing economic productivity; for making our companies more competitive and resilient; for ensuring quality employment, paying particular attention to young people and other groups who have specific difficulties finding employment; and for guaranteeing decent working conditions in line with the Decent Work goals championed by the ILO. The newly adopted tripartite standard for quality apprenticeships in the International Labour Conference 2023 is a positive contribution to this effort. Ultimately, quality and effective training ensuring access to quality jobs and just transition in the labour market is crucial to enable Europe to successfully face digitalization and the continuous development of a green and sustainable economy.

6. We highlight that basic skills are a pre-condition for successful labour market integration. The provision of job-related training should be developed through improved cooperation between governments and social partners, including the need for well-designed financial incentives, according to the terms established by national laws or agreed in collective agreements and taking into account national industrial relations and education and training practices. Improved skills training will play a key role in enabling workers to progress in their careers and enterprises to remain productive and innovative. Supporting people who are far

from the labour market is a high priority and special attention must be paid to ensure access to trainings for priority vulnerable groups. In particular, an increased effort should be focused on young people not in education, employment and training (NEETs) via more targeted individualised support and real opportunities to enter into the labour market.

We emphasize that quality and free professional guidance, as well as access to the recognition and validation of key competences and professional skills, constitute essential services for the entire active population and should be guaranteed to all.

7. We commit to steadily improve EU and Member State initiatives, with the involvement of social partners, regarding training at the workplace while respecting the autonomy of social partners and social dialogue and collective agreements at national, sectoral and company levels.

8. As part of the European Year of Skills and its follow-up, we will organize conferences, debates, events, and we will disseminate good practices, publications, and information, communication and awareness-raising campaigns also with the view to underlining the importance of social dialogue in accessing skills. The goal of these initiatives will be to underscore the strategic importance of skills for the Future of Work, and to mobilize all stakeholders, both public and private, so that they adopt specific measures to upskill and reskill working-age people.

9. We undertake, together and in the framework of social dialogue, to continue to promote skills, upskilling and reskilling after the European Year of Skills, as this constitutes a structural, cross-cutting component of economic, employment and social policies.

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