



EUROPEAN YEAR OF SKILLS *What comes next?*

Brussels and online, 30 April 2024





[Watch the recording here](#)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF SKILLS: WHAT COMES NEXT?	4
WHAT WAS ACHIEVED? THE YEAR IN NUMBERS	5
OPENING SPEECH	7
PANEL 1: NATIONAL COORDINATORS' CONVERSATION ON SKILLS	8
PANEL 2: A STEPPING-STONE TOWARDS EUROPE'S SKILLS REVOLUTION	10
SPOTLIGHT: THE 'PACT FOR SKILLS' IN ACTION	12
SPOTLIGHT: EU AGENCIES DRIVING PROGRESS AND IMPACT	13
INSPIRATIONAL MOMENT	14
REAL PEOPLE, REAL SKILLS	15
PANEL 3: SKILLS REVOLUTION: AN IMPERATIVE FOR THE EUROPE OF TODAY AND TOMORROW	16
CLOSING REMARKS	19
DISCUSSION GROUPS	20
SKILLS-FIRST APPROACHES	21
BETTER SKILLS INTELLIGENCE AND SMARTER USE OF IT	22
UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING APPROACHES: EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS	23
INVESTMENT IN SKILLS: AGILE FUNDING APPROACHES FOR PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS	24
ADDRESSING SKILLS SHORTAGES: WHICH INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS?	25
THE HUMAN EDGE: LEVERAGING TRANSVERSAL SKILLS IN THE AI-DRIVEN WORKPLACE	26
THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF SKILLS: WHAT COMES NEXT?	30



THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF SKILLS: WHAT COMES NEXT?

Launched on Europe Day, 9 May 2023, **the European Year of Skills (the 'Year')** aimed to **promote a mindset of upskilling and reskilling**, to steer policy debate and to drive concrete action on skills development to address one of Europe's most pressing challenges to its competitiveness: shortages of skilled labour forces. The Year underscored that investing in skills development and lifelong learning is essential to the smooth functioning of the European labour market. A skilled workforce is fundamental to reaping the benefits of the green and digital transitions and supporting Europe's sustainable competitiveness and economic and social resilience.

"The European Year of Skills – what comes next?" event marked the end of the European Year of Skills. The conference was organised by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) and brought together over **more than 400 in-presence and close to 1,000 online viewers**.

The day was a rich celebration of the **achievements of the Year**. It highlighted the Year's results across Europe and placed a spotlight on the impact of skills development on all economic sectors, on Europe's competitiveness, and on people's lives. Many inspiring skills stories featured throughout the event

to show that a mindset of upskilling and reskilling matters and pays off for companies and individuals. The event also provided a platform to discuss the **Year's outcomes and legacy** through political and stakeholder panels, speeches, conversations, and interactive groups. Collectively, these elements helped identify key topics for today and for the future, which are captured in this report.

This rich exchange of ideas would not have been possible without the **commitment of all stakeholders** representing the skills community of Europe who made the Year a success – the Year's National Coordinators; EU, national, and local level public authorities; education and training providers; social partners; public and private employment services; civil society; international organisations; and small, medium and large businesses.

At "The European Year of Skills – what comes next?", the skills community reaffirmed their commitment to further their efforts in changing mindsets and offering training over a lifelong perspective – upskilling and reskilling in the labour market should be the norm. The participants and speakers involved in panel and group discussions considered the **Year a success** and recognised the need to maintain the momentum created.

WHAT WAS ACHIEVED? THE YEAR IN NUMBERS



With the focus on people the Year sought to reach beyond Brussels to every corner of Europe. The Year was very successful in this regard, engaging with people and organisations across Europe to discuss and take action on skills. More than 2000 events were held, covering all EU Member States, as well as accession and neighbourhood countries. This extensive conversation on skills was complemented by specific initiatives such as TV advertisements (aired in five EU countries with the greatest need for awareness of EU social rights) and a targeted campaign on Twitch (aimed at reaching young people not in education, employment, or training). Furthermore, the DG EMPL communication campaign reached millions of people across traditional and social media.

At the European level, there is a strong focus on promoting and supporting skills development and use. For example, the actions of the European Skills Agenda is creating opportunities for millions of people to improve their skills and their prospects in the labour market. It pushes for better recognition and understanding of skills and qualifications across borders and creates space for social partners, education and training providers and other stakeholders to take action in making a culture of lifelong learning a reality. The European Skills Agenda goals, targeting both individuals and organisations, are supported by EU funding.

- The **Pact for Skills** has over **2500 members**, and 20 Large-Scale Partnerships in all 14 Industrial Ecosystems. **3.5 million people have taken training courses** set up under the Pact. In the coming years, the aim is to upskill and reskill 25 million people.
- 15 Member States are using EU funding to develop **Individual Learning Accounts**.
- The **European Alliance for Apprenticeships** has reached more than **440 pledges, 40 national commitments**, and over 2.5 million apprenticeship offers.
- There are **53 funded Centres of Vocational Excellence**.
- **€ 65 billion EU funding** from the European Social Fund+ and Resilience Facility for investment in skills for 2021 - 2027



The end of the European Year of Skills is more of a beginning — a beginning with a renewed focus, enthusiasm, and obligation to take action.

Margrethe Vestager, Executive Vice President of the European Commission for a Europe fit for the Digital Age



OPENING SPEECH

Executive Vice President Vestager opened the event by recalling that skills are essential for the evolving job landscape and in the current context of green and digital transitions.

Europeans must master new technologies to fully realise their benefits and confidently navigate the digital transition. Learning new skills, whether digital, green, or otherwise, enhances people's overall confidence and happiness. On the other hand, equipping Europeans with the skills to seize the employment opportunities that the green transition offers can help counter climate change scepticism. "Skills are at the intersection of social, green, and digital transitions, fostering a competitive economy."

The European Year of Skills, with over 2000 events, had fostered skills development across Europe. "The EYS was an 'all-of-Europe effort'." Enabling people to upskill and reskill throughout life will remain a key strategic priority after the Year. Ms. Vestager concluded by urging stakeholders to continue their efforts and build on the legacy of the Year.

PANEL 1:

NATIONAL COORDINATORS' CONVERSATION ON SKILLS

In this panel discussion, the National Coordinators of the European Year of Skills from Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, Finland and France shared their experience and achievements in implementing the Year at the national level.

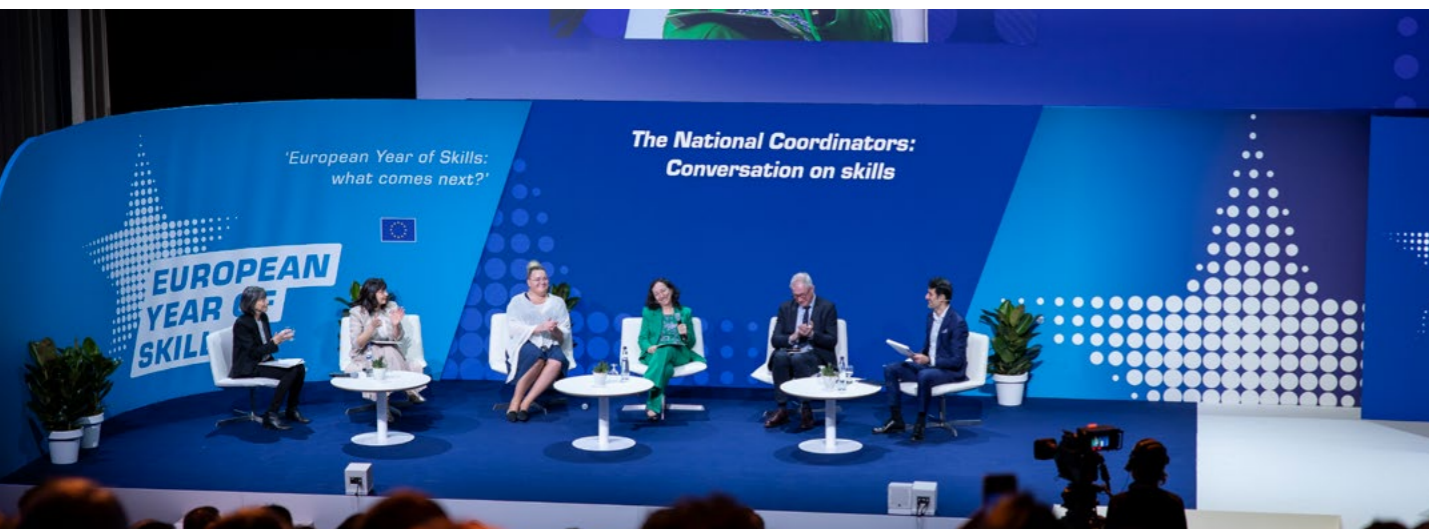
Teea Oja from Finland highlighted the importance of effective collaboration among institutions, stakeholder engagement, and a holistic approach to skills development. Two different ministries were closely involved in coordinating efforts in legislation and funding. Lifelong guidance systems, including digital study information services and skills-market matching tools, were central to Finland's approach, with recent development co-funded by the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

Marianne de Brunhoff from France spoke of collaboration with the Association Pour l'Emploi des Cadres (APEC) and various partners that facilitated a focus on skills issues, promoting transitions, validation, and visibility for training professionals. She highlighted the role of Individual Learning Accounts for their universal accessibility and simplicity, and their exceptional potential to benefit marginalised groups.

Representing Bulgaria, **Natalia Efremova** highlighted how the Year provided an opportunity to increase awareness on existing policies while also incorporating changes, including a unified policy on skills and legislative adjustments to expedite training pathways. During the Year, Bulgaria introduced the National Skills Action Plan targeting young people, adults, and



European Year of Skills National Coordinators



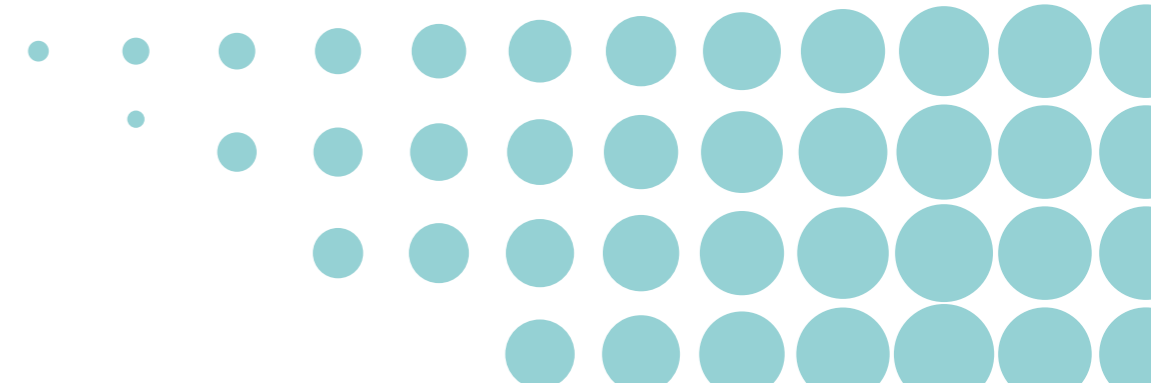
Speakers:

- **Belgium:** **Guibert Debroux**, Head, Department "Skills & Training, Business Services and Operational Partnerships" of Walloon Public Employment and Vocational Training Service;
Willem De Klerck, Senior Policy Advisor, Flemish Department for Work and Social Economy;
Frédéric Romano, Head of European and International Relations, Bruxelles Formation
- **Bulgaria:** **Natalia Efremova**, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of Bulgaria
- **Spain:** **Maria Antonia Agudo**, Deputy Director General, Institutional Relations and Judicial Assistance, Spanish Public Employment Service (SEPE)
- **Finland:** **Teea Oja**, Chief Specialist, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland
- **France:** **Marianne de Brunhoff**, Project Director, Ministry of Labour of France

governance. The plan aims to facilitate easy access to training, also through the implementation of the Individual Learning Accounts initiative and micro-credentials, aided by the RRF for curriculum updates.

Maria Antonia Agudo from Spain emphasised how the success of the Year required collaboration, underscoring the indispensable role of the National Coordinators' team. Partnership and governance were pivotal for success. During the Year, Spain introduced specific programmes focusing on young people and women's employment, as well as digital skills enhancement, organised flagships events such as a High-Level Conference on active labour market policies and initiated the [Tripartite Joint Statement](#).

Guibert Debroux, Willem De Klerck, and Frédéric Romano from Belgium presented the statement "Beyond the European Year of Skills – Maintaining the Momentum", initiated by Belgium and agreed upon by all National Coordinators. They emphasised the importance of transcending national boundaries in building on the Year's legacy and stressed the necessity of integrating the skills dimension transversally in all policies.



PANEL 2: A STEPPING-STONE TOWARDS EUROPE'S SKILLS REVOLUTION



The panel brought together some key stakeholders representing learners, education and training providers, public employment services, and small and large businesses. They highlighted their efforts in advancing the Year's goals, shared successful skills initiatives implemented during the Year, and reflected on emerging themes.

"Public Employment Services seized the momentum of the Year by multiplying events and projects on skills development," **Caroline Mancel** said. In particular, the Year confirmed the need for an inclusive approach and tailored solutions for vulnerable groups, as implemented in several countries. **Fernando Sigchos Jimenez** highlighted initiatives in small construction businesses to attract women and foster leadership (e.g. outreach activities led by women, Erasmus+ project "Women Can Build"). **Per Schrøder**

shared how Danish State Railways achieved a 50% female hire goal for working on suburban trains by implementing inclusive recruitment strategies. **Paolo Nardi** explained how the European Forum for Vocational Education and Training (EfVET) promotes inclusion, stressing that changing attitudes towards inclusion is essential for skills development and societal transformation: "Inclusion is key to a skills revolution."

The European Network of Public Employment Services would like to declare a decade of skills.
Caroline Mancel

Transformation and the need to adapt are visible in all sectors and society at large, impacted by the **green and digital transitions**. Mr. Jimenez spoke

of transitions that the construction sector is undergoing: "Apart from the green and digital transitions in the construction sector, there is a third one – the skills transition." Digital skills are part of a new assessment initiative of the Public Employment Services, targeting young people, mentioned Ms. Mancel.

Inclusion is key to a skills revolution.

Paolo Nardi

Brikena Xhomaqi, representing the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL), highlighted the role of **transversal skills**. LLLP recommends linking validation to initiatives like micro-credentials or Individual Learning Accounts. Ms. Tucci explained how the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) and the European Apprentices Network (EAN) broadened their perspective to focus on transversal skills and lifelong learning, amplifying learners' voices. They called for holistic skills development and used Erasmus+ funding to shape young people's perception of skills: "Young people need to understand that everything we do throughout life is a skill," Ms. Tucci said.

You have to think out of the box and then make it happen.

Per Schrøder

Several panellists highlighted the role of **career guidance** to help people navigate an increasingly complex landscape of learning and jobs at all stages of life. They spoke of effective initiatives, including counselling by Public Employment Services, early career guidance in schools to attract to specific sectors, and skills competitions. Ms. Xhomaqi advocated for lifelong learning as a right for all, emphasising tailored opportunities and support mechanisms like guidance.

All panellists agreed that **cooperation** among all stakeholders is crucial for holistic skills development and for policies to align with reality. Mr. Schrøder stressed that cooperation with unions and national authorities was key to develop and put in place the innovative S-train driver training programme at Danish State Railways in a record short time. Ms. Mancel spoke of efforts of the Public Employment Services Network that resulted in a Memorandum calling for better skills intelligence to address labour market challenges. Mr. Nardi reflected on the importance of fostering collaboration beyond Europe and being part of the bigger skills community.

The right to lifelong learning is not only about providing learning opportunities but tailoring them to people and building support mechanisms.

Brikena Xhomaqi

The moderator asked the audience: **What new skills did you learn this year?**



Speakers:

- **Caroline Mancel**, Chair, European Network of Public Employment Services and Deputy Director, General of Actiris, Brussels
- **Paolo Nardi**, Executive Director, European Forum for Vocational Education and Training (EfVET)
- **Fernando Sigchos Jimenez**, Secretary General, European Builders Confederation (EBC)
- **Per Schrøder**, Executive Vice President, Operations of the Danish State Railways (DSB)
- **Giuseppina Tucci**, Representative, European Apprentices Network (EAN) & Secretary General, Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)
- **Brikena Xhomaqi**, Director, Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL)

SPOTLIGHT:

THE 'PACT FOR SKILLS' IN ACTION

In this session, two success stories from Pact for Skills stakeholders were showcased, emphasising the tangible benefits of participation in the Offshore Renewable Energy Partnership. Additionally, a significant milestone was celebrated with the recognition of the 2500th Pact member.

Mariana Batista stressed the role the Pact for Skills is playing in matching people's aspirations and skills with job market opportunities. The Offshore Renewable Energy Partnership established a skills observatory, promotes careers in the sector, and developed tailored training programmes. Ms. Batista encouraged stakeholders to continue fostering collaboration across industries, emphasising that "a skilled workforce is essential for us to meet our climate goals, and we must do everything in our power to keep it high on everyone's agenda."

Elisabete Pinto da Silva shared her inspiring upskilling journey that brought her from Brazil to Belgium and from research to the offshore renewable energy sector. Today, Ms. Pinto da Silva is truly happy and proud of her career trajectory: "My learning goes on," she concluded.

Lastly, the 2500th Pact Member **Mike Kaminiaris** from AGENSO, highlighted how the Pact tangibly contributed to the growth of his business and networking when receiving the award: "I invite everyone to join the Pact for Skills!"



Mariana Batista and Elisabete Pinto da Silva, from WindEurope, explain key benefits of partnerships under the Pact for Skills and share inspiring upskilling stories.



Mike Kaminiaris, representing AGENSO, receives an award for the 2,500th organisation joining the Pact for Skills from Manuela Geleng, Director for Jobs and Skills at Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission.

Speakers:

- Mariana Batista, Senior Advisor Education & Skills, WindEurope
- Elisabete Pinto da Silva, Steel Structures Specialist, WindEurope
- Mike Kaminiaris, Project and Communications Manager, AGENSO

SPOTLIGHT:

EU AGENCIES DRIVING PROGRESS AND IMPACT

Speakers:

- Manuela Prina, Head of Skills Identification and Development Unit, European Training Foundation (ETF)
- Jürgen Siebel, Executive Director of European Center for Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)

EU agencies ETF and CEDEFOP played a pivotal role in making the European Year of Skills a success by providing quality expertise and engaging stakeholders in Europe and beyond.

Manuela Prina called for global action on skills, recognising the fundamental dimension of international cooperation. Ms. Prina wished for peace as a foundation for investing in skills, nurturing talent, and humanity.



To address skills shortages in the EU, we need to do it together with our neighbouring countries.

Manuela Prina

Jürgen Siebel highlighted the impacts of technological innovation on skills and job quality, stressing the need to address skill shortages comprehensively and invest in skills and jobs for those who are less aware and less likely to train. He echoed Commissioner Schmit's call for lifelong learning, emphasising its centrality to the European project.



Those needing more skills are often less aware and less likely to participate in training, exacerbating labour and skills shortages. To counteract this [...], we need to invest in skills and jobs altogether.

Jürgen Siebel





INSPIRATIONAL MOMENT

Three slam poets shared thought-provoking poems they had written about the role, future, and scope of skills development.

Matic Acko from Slovenia underlined the importance of perseverance on the road to acquiring new skills: He shared his own story of becoming a slam poet and underscored every person's ability to learn: "Brilliant people aren't born brilliant."

“Mastery might take 10.000 hours of practice, but just because something is hard doesn't mean you shouldn't try!”

Matic Acko

Shaunna Lee Lynch from Ireland stressed the societal dimension of skills through inclusion and accessibility of skills development for everyone. Asking the audience to imagine the future in 50 years, Ms. Lynch made a call for action while painting a picture that is hopeful, holistic, and full

of potential: "We have an opportunity to make real change, not just for profits and capital gains, but to really make this world a better place for everyone."

“Heroes don't just wear capes, they are the people working every day, coding, designing, building a fairer and greener future for everybody.”

Shaunna Lee Lynch

Elif Duygu from Austria painted a picture of skills as "a golden bracelet on your arm." Skills are an investment in yourself and a way to provide for yourself and your family when the time comes. In her case, writing creatively is the hidden skill that gave her a job and a career she loves.

“The skills that you learn today, will be the seeds you plant for tomorrow. You never know where your way will lead you and which path you'll follow.”

Elif Duygu

Real People, Real Skills opens a window to the skills journeys of 200 people across Europe and from different walks of life. People in Europe are learning new skills every day, often supported by EU initiatives. This project centres on the people who have reshaped their careers and lives through learning new skills. Click to read their inspirational stories.

PANEL 3:

SKILLS REVOLUTION: AN IMPERATIVE FOR THE EUROPE OF TODAY AND TOMORROW

The high-level panel concluded the day by reflecting on the achievements of the European Year of Skills, sharing good practice, and discussing their wishes for future actions and priorities to build on the legacy of the Year.

All speakers highlighted that the Year has given a great impetus to skills development in Europe and placed skills among the priorities of the EU, national governments, and social partners across all policy areas. All panellists expressed enthusiasm for continuing the collaborative efforts to build on the Year's achievements, fostering a culture of lifelong learning, ensuring competitiveness of Europe, and matching the needs of today's evolving labour markets.

Commissioner Nicolas Schmit called to extend the Year to at least a "decade of skills" and stressed the need to further enhance advisory structures to better understand actual skill needs and promote social dialogue to build confidence and motivate workers to upskill and reskill: "The essence of social dialogue is also confidence-building in workers, to trust their reskilling journey."

Member of the European Parliament João Albuquerque recalled the importance of transversal skills and urged investment in training and solid partnerships: "For me the right approach to skills is an interconnection between the public, the private and the individual."



Speakers:

- **Nicolas Schmit**, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights
- **João Albuquerque**, Member, Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, European Parliament
- **Benjamin Bierlaire**, Deputy Head of Cabinet of Christie Morreale, Vice-President, the Walloon Government and Minister for Employment, Training, Health, Social Action, Social Economy, Equal Opportunities and Women's Rights (Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU)
- **Maxime Cerutti**, Director of Social Affairs, Business Europe
- **Tea Jarc**, Confederal Secretary, European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
- **Valeria Ronzitti**, Secretary General, Sustainability, Growth and Innovation Europe
- **Véronique Willems**, Secretary General, SMEUnited

Benjamin Bierlaire underlined the importance of inclusion, shared responsibility, and quality training, and called for a just transition that leaves no one behind. He concluded that "Policy makers must react to change but also anticipate and innovate to shape a more digital and greener future."

Maxime Cerutti welcomed the "Action plan to tackle labour and skill shortages" as an important outcome of the Year and called for upscaling training participation and supporting incentives for employers: "What is essential is really to focus on training provision that is going to be supported by the right incentives for employers to be able to provide training to a larger scale."

Tea Jarc stressed green collective bargaining as a good practice for anticipating change and demanded equal access to quality training for all workers, especially disadvantaged groups: "With collective agreements we can anticipate the change [...] to reach the green goals and give a signal to workers that there is a future for them even if the workplace changes or jobs are being lost."

Valeria Ronzitti emphasized strengthening transversal skills, adapting curricula, and training teachers and educators as important factors for the transfor-

mation: "Transversal skills [...] are key if we want to make the decade of skills work."

Véronique Willems highlighted the need to reform basic education and promote vocational education and training as a career path. She also highlighted the role of apprenticeships and teaching on the job: "A lot of our entrepreneurs are investing hugely in apprenticeships and teaching young people on the job. [...] We see that the employment rate after apprenticeships is around 95%."

Commissioner Nicolas Schmit concluded "We have managed to put skills on all the agendas: on the European, on the national, on the social partners agenda [...] and all declarations this year have integrated the idea of skills."



The push coming from the Year of Skills should be continued and even increased, the spark is there – now we have to get the fire burning.

Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights



CLOSING REMARKS

Commissioner Schmit closed the event by highlighting that the European Year of Skills has successfully branded skills as a cross-cutting topic on the agendas of the European Union, national governments, and social partners. The Commissioner stressed that skills remain a crucial priority given the current demographic context and persistent labour and skills shortages. Additionally, the Commissioner noted that investing in skills is crucial to promote industry in Europe and boost growth. Skills initiatives such as the Pact for Skills are showing great results, and Commissioner Schmit invited continued and accelerated progress in this work.

He concluded by calling for continued collective efforts to build on the legacy of the Year. Commissioner Schmit emphasised the importance of reaching the 2030 headline target of 60% of adults participating in training. Investing in people and fostering learning is a question of social justice and competitiveness. Therefore, sticking to our commitments is crucial to succeed on the broader Union's priorities.

DISCUSSION GROUPS

THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF SKILLS: WHAT COMES NEXT?

Participants had the opportunity to exchange on the future of skills policies in six parallel discussion groups, with each group focusing on one key theme emerging from the Year. All groups were led by skills experts and practitioners, who provided inspiring examples and testimonials. Two out of the six topics were proposed by stakeholders, selected on the basis of 68 proposals.

The interactive discussion groups provided space to listen to the views of all actors and stakeholders, to share knowledge and experience, to inspire each other, and to identify areas considered important for future action.



SKILLS-FIRST APPROACHES

Co-created with:

- Rik Bleeker, CSR Manager Europe North, CISCO
- Laure Joachim, Head of Public Funding, the Adecco Group
- Jaana Kettunen, Researcher Professor, Finnish Institute for Educational Research of the University of Jyväskylä, Finland
- Maud Sacquet, Head of Public Policy and Government Affairs, LinkedIn

Skills-first approaches in recruitment and career advancement are being increasingly highlighted as a potential solution to the skills challenge in Europe, opening new opportunities for individuals, employers, education and training providers and labour market actors to make the most of under-explored talent. The discussion explored the meaning of skills-first from the perspective of these different actors, exchanging ideas on concrete actions needed to realise the full potential of skills-first approaches.

The discussion showed that the idea of skills-first approaches encompasses multiple dimensions. Individuals must be at the centre, alongside enabling frameworks that promote lifelong learning from an early stage, accessibility, individual guidance, flexible learning pathways and career management skills for learners, ensuring transparency and trust in all learning opportunities. The focus should be on broader competencies, continuous dialogue, and building skills alliances between education and training providers and employers.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have fewer resources to implement skills-first approaches and rely to a larger extent on qualifications to assess candidates. This is why they need tailored support – information, networks, financing – to develop new recruitment practices and to establish a learning culture.

Labour market intermediaries also face new challenges, namely how to value qualifications and skills in a balanced way when assessing candidates, or how to ensure fair remuneration for the same skills, even in the absence of a qualification. Key factors such as in-company training, skills identification and certifica-

tion, require more support (e.g. targeted and modular training programmes, mentoring systems, entry-level training programmes, in-company talent schemes).

EMERGING IDEAS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS:

MOST VOTED:

Increase opportunities to tap into under-used talent, focusing on an open approach by recruiters and talent managers and addressing SMEs concerns. Ensure modularity, permeability of qualifications, and flexibility of learning pathways and support for the transformation of training and education ecosystems.

- Develop a “human-centred approach”, with easily accessible guidance available to all.
- Promote the importance of lifelong learning within society and learning conducive workplaces, fostering a culture of ongoing skills development and dialogue among all actors on the value of lifelong learning.
- Focus on more clearly understood transversal skills, explaining their added value and potential.
- Support companies in moving from identifying skills to certifying skills. Develop internal recognition processes so that specific skills are recognised after specific tasks are executed. Promote the same understanding when referring to terms such as “validation”, “assessment”, and “recognition”.
- Address the mismatch in the mindsets among actors, striking a balance between “skills” and “qualifications”.
- Raise awareness and increase funding for skills intelligence collaborations between companies including SMEs.

BETTER SKILLS INTELLIGENCE AND SMARTER USE OF IT

Co-created with Cedefop and:

- **John Edwards**, Secretary General, the European Association of Applied Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE)
- **Noreen Fitzpatrick**, Employee Development Manager, Further Education and Training Authority in Ireland (SOLAS)
- **Rolf Gehring**, European Federation of Building and Woodworkers
- **Silvia Melegari**, Secretary General, European confederation of Woodworking industries (CEI-Bois)
- **Spiros Protopsaltis**, Governor and Chair of the Board, Greek Public Employment Service (DYPA)

Sound skills intelligence is crucial for addressing labour and skills shortages and shaping education and training provision, but still faces challenges in its practical implementation. In this discussion group, stakeholders sought to enhance the relevance and usability of skills intelligence across regions and sectors by developing proposals for actionable improvements.

The discussion emphasised the need for a robust methodology to accurately forecast future skills requirements, ensuring alignment between job seekers' skills and employers' needs. Forecasting skills needs remains a challenging task, especially given employers' difficulties in anticipating future skill requirements. However, integrating employer insights in forecasting methodologies, such as those provided by Public Employment Services, can help gain a more comprehensive understanding of future skills needs and proactive measures to address future skill gaps.

Understanding evolving skills contexts and fostering effective coordination among stakeholders to adapt to rapid changes in skill demands emerged in the discussion in relation to Vocational Education and Training. Low data precision is a challenge, but collaborative regional efforts can offer an effective strategy to improve skills intelligence – for example with joint action plans and targeted dissemination of skills intelligence insights. The example of a Sectoral Expert Council also emerged as a good practice model of stakeholder-driven approaches in skills development.



EMERGING IDEAS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS:

MOST VOTED:

Develop and implement regional/local skills strategies, with all key stakeholders in the skills ecosystem to better understand and respond to social, regional, economic needs. Think globally, act locally.

- Create skills councils (at national, regional, and local level) to serve as a 'bridge', bringing together different stakeholders with a focus on dialogue, partnership, local data to generate better skills intelligence and coordination with the education system.
- Gather accurate, reliable and real-time intelligence on the needs of the economy to create training opportunities. Support the creation of targeted, modular, and demand-driven upskilling opportunities co-designed through public-private partnerships.

UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING APPROACHES: EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS

Co-created with:

- **Dario Baron**, Senior Expert Advisor at the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy of Croatia
- **Catherine Dolhaine**, Policy officer, Department of Work and Social Economy (Flanders, Belgium)
- **Mandy Mifsud**, Education Officer, Ministry for Education and Employment of Malta
- **Sandrine Portier**, Deputy Director & Head of Benchmark and Communication Unit, France Travail
- **Hanne Shapiro**, Skill Policy Researcher and Advisor

In an evolving world of work, the need for training can arise unexpectedly for anyone. The discussion group explored how universal training support measures, such as Individual Learning Accounts and micro-credentials, can ignite a cultural shift towards upskilling and reskilling. It provided ideas on how to tackle a key challenge: skills systems need to be universal yet able to provide differentiated support to those with specific needs.

The need to create a culture of lifelong learning and to motivate individuals to take up training by making learning a regular activity emerged in the discussion. This should be accompanied by the right incentive structure and improved outreach. It is also important to make training accessible for people from disadvantaged backgrounds by considering possible barriers such as childcare and transportation costs.

Another crucial point that emerged is the need for "human centric" tailored approaches to training offerings, such as personalised training, focusing on differentiated needs at regional and sectoral level and among groups of individuals. Flexibility and consideration of non-formal and informal learning are key to designing personalised pathways.

A "whole-of-government" approach is also crucial, especially to create a learning infrastructure where public and private actors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can cooperate and prioritise skilling and upskilling across all governance sectors.

EMERGING IDEAS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS:

MOST VOTED:

Establish a culture of lifelong learning and make learning attractive to individuals through universal but differentiated training support. This approach seeks to address diverse training needs and motivations, ensuring equitable access and participation in upskilling and reskilling initiatives for all individuals.

- Strengthen "the right to training" in national legislation supported by inclusive support measures. Existing examples of universal support measures can be used to inspire policy makers and stakeholders across Member States where such legislation does not exist.
- Enhance visibility and accessibility of training opportunities through innovative policies and outreach strategies.
- Explore how micro-credentials can contribute to the creation of seamless learning pathways across formal, informal, and non-formal learning, embedded in regional and local economic development. Examine examples from outside Europe.

INVESTMENT IN SKILLS: AGILE FUNDING APPROACHES FOR PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Co-created with Cedefop and:

- Boudewijn Grievink, Program Manager Internationalization, Katapult
- Zvonimir Ratkovski, Head of MFI, Alternative lenders and fintech division, European Investment Fund (EIF)
- Valerie Rousselin Somerville, EU Funding Manager, Skillnet Ireland

Financing training remains a challenge in the EU – in terms of amounts, effectiveness, broader frameworks, and funding mechanisms. In the face of a rapidly changing world of work, flexible and innovative approaches to investment in skills are needed. Public-private partnerships offer a possible solution. The discussion explored examples of successful public-private partnerships for skills, drawing inspiration for future actions.

The discussion identified several factors for the sustainability of public-private partnerships and funding. Regarding the source of funding, private investments remain crucial, especially in a challenging business environment. However, a combination of funding from various sources is also important for sustainability. In terms of funding usage, redirecting funds towards individuals for upskilling is also essential, shifting from reliance on employer-driven support. When discussing concrete partnerships, current initiatives should be reinforced and new ones developed following a structured approach: start with pilots, evaluate their effectiveness, then expand successful projects. In general, the need for better adapted solutions for SMEs was highlighted in the discussion.



Looking into funding mechanisms, EIF guarantees for loan schemes provide the possibility for repayable loans for both companies and individuals. However, awareness of this funding is low, calling for improved information to showcase financing options. This financing could be used for example for large-scale initiatives such as setting up education cooperatives.

EMERGING IDEAS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS:

MOST VOTED:

Focus on real impact – keeping it simple could incentivise more partnerships leading to real impact.

- Implement communities of practice for stakeholders to share good practices (e.g. Centres of Vocational Excellence Community of Practice). Strengthen skills ecosystems bringing employers, unions and training providers together.
- As a transversal theme, “skills” should be reflected in all relevant EU programmes and calls for funding
- Ensure longer-term funding possibilities to provide beneficiaries with greater financial stability to enable them to concentrate on substance rather than administration.
- Ensure state aid regulation is not a barrier to investments in human capital.
- Explore the further use and role of an online repository of funding options, allowing potential beneficiaries to identify easily funding opportunities that match their needs.

ADDRESSING SKILLS SHORTAGES: WHICH INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS?

Co-created with:

- Victoire Couelle, Policy Adviser on Social Affairs, International Road Transport Union (IRU)
- Valeryia Despaigne, Adviser on Jobs & Skills, Eurocommerce
- Lena Guyon, Policy Officer on Social Affairs, European Construction Industry Federation (FIEC)
- Eleonora Isopo, Policy Executive, European Chemical Employers Group (ECEG)
- Marta Machado, Deputy Director General, Hotels, Restaurants, Bars & Cafés in Europe (HORBCE)
- Eurico Ortiga, Director Social & Legal Affairs, European Community Shipowners' Association (ECSA)
- Sergi Queralt, Senior Policy Advisor, European Employers' Group of Professional Agricultural Organisations (Geopa)
- Delphine Rudelli, Director General, European Tech & Industry Employers (Ceemet)
- Michelle Schonenberger, Senior Policy Advisor, European Banking Federation (EBF)
- Isabel Sobrino, Senior Policy Advisor, European Tech & Industry Employers (Ceemet)

Skills shortages are a challenge for all economic sectors in Europe. The discussion, led by employer representatives from nine sectors, focused on how to attract young people and women to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, develop efficient vocational education and training (VET) systems, improve skills matching for third-country nationals, and to upskill and reskill the workforce to face green and digital transitions.

Targeted communication is crucial to attract young people and women to STEM-related disciplines and studies. When developing efficient VET systems, it is important to support career guidance in early education, showcase modern workplaces, and promote centres of vocational excellence and national good practice, while involving social partners in curriculum development.

To improve skills matching of third-country nationals, hard skills, particularly digital and entrepreneurial skills, should be promoted and the recognition of third-country professional certificates competences should be improved. Employers should be supported in providing training on soft skills such as language and cultural understanding. Effective coordination between social partners and national authorities on skills matching, through initiatives such as Talent Pool and Talent Partnerships, is crucial.

Upskilling and reskilling the workforce to face the green and digital transitions requires adopting a multifaceted approach involving training, education, and continuous professional development, with cooperation along the entire value chain. It is crucial to promote a culture of learning, develop systematic thinking so that the digital and green transition is centred around people, and address digital literacy by inclusive training, especially for older workers, so no one is left behind.

EMERGING IDEAS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS:

MOST VOTED:

Strengthen continuous collaboration between social partners and national authorities to attract and retain workers, offer quality jobs, and provide them with the skills needed for the labour market.

- Strengthen coordination among stakeholders, public employment services, Member States and employers to integrate third-country nationals into the labour market and society.
- Build a culture of learning among workers and employers to upskill and reskill for new attractive jobs facilitated by online learning, supported by EU and national schemes showcasing results of skills training.

THE HUMAN EDGE: LEVERAGING TRANSVERSAL SKILLS IN THE AI-DRIVEN WORKPLACE

Co-created with:

- Mario Cardona, Deputy Principal, Malta Council for Arts, Science and Technology
- Ruth Debrincat, Senior Director, Policy & Employment Relations, National Skills Council, Malta
- Isabel De Peuter, Rutten President, Euromersive
- Clayton Micallef Grimaud, Director, Strategy, People and Culture, National Skills Council, Malta
- Karen Muscat Baldacchino, Chief Executive Officer, Malta Foundation for Human Resources Development



In the evolving landscape of the modern workplace, dominated by digital technologies and generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), transversal skills are essential. The discussion group examined the complementary relationship between transversal skills and digital advancements, and the value of transversal skillsets, drawing some ideas about future transversal skills needs.

Early education significantly shapes vital transversal skills within the first five years of life. At the adult learning level, it is crucial for all stakeholders, employers, employees, and management, to actively recognise and nurture these skills within corporate cultures. Effectively evaluating transversal skills requires possessing a comprehensive set, spanning all levels of an organisation.

In the AI-driven workplace, the impact of artificial intelligence varies based on factors like technical

expertise and institutional familiarity. Many are still grappling with the extent of AI integration, highlighting the need for heightened awareness and adaptive strategies. Robust information literacy is indispensable for navigating this landscape, enabling individuals to assess the reliability and relevance of AI-generated content and make informed decisions. Fostering transversal skills is pivotal for a dynamic and adaptable workforce capable of thriving in an evolving professional landscape.

EMERGING IDEAS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS:

MOST VOTED:

Promote the provision of training to people identifying skills gaps, given their essential role in addressing them and in providing effective upskilling opportunities to those most in need.

- Support the provision of information literacy to enable citizens to appraise AI-generated content.





THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF SKILLS: WHAT COMES NEXT?

The European Year of Skills provided a powerful boost for skills development across Europe. It served as a massive, year-long 'conversation' on skills, demonstrating that European countries are facing very similar challenges. Many of the existing European Skills Agenda actions are still valid, with a crucial need to continue work on implementation at the national level. New initiatives tackling Europe's labour and skills shortages were also launched under the banner of the Year.

The Year confirmed that skills are a strategic asset for Europe's sustainable competitiveness. They are crucial to every economic sector, the success of the green and digital transitions and key to empower people to live fulfilling lives.

"The European Year of Skills – What Comes Next?", as a culmination of the collective effort throughout the Year, marked a new beginning. It was recognised that "a year of skills" is not enough, with calls for "at least a decade of skills", symbolising the need to embrace a new era of continuous upskilling and reskilling for adults.

The Year may be over, but the work goes on!

The moderator asked the audience:
How will your organisation carry on the legacy of the European Year of Skills?



CONTACT INFORMATION

EMPL B2 UNIT <EMPL-B2-UNIT@ec.europa.eu>

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion
B-1049 Brussels
BELGIUM

SOCIALS

#EuropeanYearofSkills

LinkedIn: @EU Employment & Skills

X: @EU_Social

Facebook: @EU Social

Website: European Year of Skills (europa.eu)